

STRATEGY PROCESS: A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES
IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined strategy process: a tool for sustainable development of public universities in south-south Nigeria. It is based on theoretical and opinion issues. The paper identifies Universities as universal phenomena which are established for the good of all now and in the future but the achievement of their objectives are constrained due to challenges facing them. The content delivery of the study is government funded public universities in south-south Nigeria. There are Six (6) Federal Universities and Six (6) State Universities in South-South Nigeria. The Universities are University of Benin, Ambrose Ali University Ekpoma, Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Delta State University Abraka, Federal University Otueke, Niger Delta University Amasoma, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University of Science and Technology Port Harcourt, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden, University of Calabar, and Cross River State University of Technology, Calabar. The paper focuses on different steps of Implementation ranging from: Resource allocation, Organisation structure design, planning framework, Leading and staffing, Change and communication and Evaluation. Key concepts of the paper were operationally defined. Theoretical Framework for this study is based on the Resource-Based Theory. The paper further presented the relevance of the strategy process to the field of management. The paper concluded that there are based innovative funding strategies which have been recognized to be effective in reversing the lingering problem of underfunding in South-south Nigerian universities. It recommended among others that all stakeholders must be involved in the provision of university education through integrated approach to university education finance.

Keywords: Strategy, Implementation, Formulation, Sustainable

Introduction

Universities as universal phenomena are established for the good of all now and in the future, but the achievement of their objectives could be constrained due to some challenges facing them. In such instances, sustainable development could become a mirage while poverty, illiteracy, technological backwardness and environmental degradation would remain pronounced. The size and complexity of universities today call for rapid and efficient methods of planning, communication and analysis of their management functions. Therefore, organizations of this nature are facing exciting and dynamic challenges in the 21st century. In the globalized business, companies require strategic thinking and only by evolving good policy strategies can they become strategically competitive. A sustained or sustainable development advantage occurs when firm implements a value creating strategy of which other organisation is unable to duplicate the benefits or find it too costly to initiate. Thus, the formulation and implementation of strategies will influence the quality of the university output.

Udoh & Ogujawa (2024) states that University is a peculiar organization. It is essentially an academic community, an institution where ideas are generated, where high standards are set and maintained. For administrative and academic purposes, there are two major decision-making bodies in a university, namely, the Council and the Senate. The council as a body governing the university, is charged with the general control and formulation of the policies, management of finance and care of university property as well as her public relations. All administrative and academic staff of the university are employees of the council, whose chairman is the Pro-chancellor. An important committee of a university council is Finance and General Purposes Committee whose functions include control of the property and expenditure of the University. The functions of the university senate include organization and control of the

teaching of the students, their disciplines, and the promotion of research activities in the institution.

The content delivery of the study is government funded public universities in south-south Nigeria. There are Six (6) Federal Universities and Six (6) State Universities in South-South Nigeria. The Universities are: University of Benin, Ambrose Ali University Ekpoma, Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Delta State University Abraka, Federal University Otueke, Niger Delta University Amasoma, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University of Science and Technology Port Harcourt, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden, University of Calabar, and Cross River State University of Technology, Calabar. The South - South region of Nigeria is strategically located at the point where the Y tail of the River Niger joins the Atlantic Ocean through the Gulf of Guinea. Though a relatively small stretch of land, the south - south of the country provides the economic mainstay of the economy- oil.

In addition to oil and gas, the region equally contributes other key resources, with potential huge investment opportunities in tourism and agriculture. As observes by Mbon, David and Ataire (2024), South South geo political zone is the economic hub of Nigeria, the zone contributes about 80 percent of revenue earnings and 90 percent of foreign exchange earnings to the country. The region lies on latitude 5 degrees North of the Equator and extends into the Gulf of Guinea, dividing the Bight of Benin (to the West) from the Bight Biafra (to the East). The region is border in the North by Imo State, Abia State, Ebonyi State, in the South by Atlantic Ocean, in the West Cameroon and in the East by Kogi State.

The UNESCO (1998) and World Bank (2000) in agreement reported that universities are founded for the promotion of endogenous capacity, sustainable development, the building and strengthening of peace, understanding among human beings

and democracy. Universities also promote freedom and human rights, changes in work processes and in the nature of economic activities and the extra ordinary development of the new information and communication technologies. They reported that university education must be relevant to individual and community needs and aspirations to be called quality education as it is only quality education that could ensure sustainable development. Therefore, the central task of university education is to train and educate from a long-term perspective, short term adaptation to the labor market, personal development and contribution by individuals to social and economic development through education in citizenship and lifelong training (UNESCO, 1998). Thus, the development of the nation's human capital to explore and exploit the country's natural resources tends to depend on the universities' ability to generate knowledge, transfer knowledge and apply knowledge. This had necessitated the statement of objectives of teaching, research and community service that are explicitly geared towards the sustainable development of the nation in all ramifications (FGN, 2004).

Strategy formulation and implementation as the cornerstones are shall be described and explained in detail particularly, the three mutual tools (participation, awareness raising & public relations and project management) shall be dealt with. The problem analysis stands at the beginning of most planning processes. The main parts of the problem analysis are the: formulation of objectives and goals, analysis of the current situation and analysis of deficiencies. Policies to reach defined aims are well known and documented – the main problem is their implementation – not in terms of building or enacting a new law – but to convince the involved parties, mainly the citizens, and to gain their awareness and acceptance. To define accepted goals which comprise accepted measures is the main challenge politicians and planners are facing. At its core, the strategy process involves decisions and actions, though not necessarily in that

sequence. Three of the four major perspectives on strategy process research deal with decisions/actions. This article focuses on different steps of Implementation ranging from: (i) Resource allocation, (ii) Organisation structure design, (iii) Planning framework, (iv) Leading and staffing, (v) Change and communication and (vi) Evaluation

The implementation is the final stage of the planning process; actually, it is the operational phase, where the plans/projects are realised. The political decisions legitimise this realisation of defined concepts/measures, budgeting, construction of infrastructure, institutional changes, etc. During that phase quality control has to be granted to provide an opportunity of making necessary adjustments. Implementation is a key problem of today's policy, as we have numerous success promising instruments leading towards a sustainable development, but we have a great deficiency of their implementation. The instruments and tools for implementation are similar to the instruments in the policy formulation process. The emphasis however shall lie on: Project management, Participation and Public relations and awareness raising.

However, Policy Formulation and Implementation are both central parts of the strategic planning process. Whereas policy formulation stands at the top and builds up the framework, implementation is a direct consequence of the decisions so to speak of the output of policy formulation. Several tools exist for both parts which assist in achieving their goals and which support the forthcoming and success of the process. Scenario technique is the vital one for policy formulation, control of success the one which provides the necessary quality of implementation. Both share the tools participation, awareness raising & public relations and project management. Project management ensures a consistent course of events, whereas participation and awareness raising target at the overcoming of political

and especially social barriers and at guaranteeing success of plans, implemented measures, etc. under the aspect of acceptance.

Significance of the Study

This study will be of great benefits to companies and industries that operate "Out of the Spotlight", Lecturers, University Community, International Organisations, Strategy Management Society, Educational Researchers and National Universities Commission.

- a. The strategies are expected to improve resources that will be of help to student's knowledge. The teacher is the facilitator and the learning situation is students - centred for impactful output. It is hoped that the proposal will be of great benefit to university lecturers on the need of facilities improvement. The university lecturers play very critical roles towards improving the quality of teaching and learning, research, community services and other functions of university by adopting a distributive approach involving other internal and external stakeholders in the management of affairs that will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the decision-making process of the institution for improved policy implementation and better learning outcomes of students.
- b. It is hope that the recommendations of the study would therefore expose to the Universities management itself through Academic Planning Unit of the Universities the negative or positive effect of strategy process. Academic Planning Unit is a unit expected to collate, manage, and interpret data to guide the Academic development of universities and to ensure compliance with the National Universities Commissions Minimum Academic Standards has it enhances efficiency in teaching, learning and

research in the university and ensures dissemination and publication of relevant information and knowledge. Among other key functions of academic planning unit is to provide the criteria for institutional accreditation in terms of the quality and conduciveness of the institutions physical environment to learning.

- c. The study will be of immense benefit to academic agencies international and local like National Universities Commission NUC in Nigeria. If strategy process is found to be related to sustainable development, it is hope that the Commission and other agencies will see the need for universities to carry capability with the minimum number of students that the human and material resources available in the university can support for quality delivery of education on a particular programme. If a university enrolls just to the point of it carrying capacity (or less) for a programme, chances are that the quality of products from that programme will be assured, if no collateral distortions such as strikes come to bear at some point while training.
- d. The balance between quantity and quality would be established through a policy of not exceeding enrolment carrying capacity. Broadly, the National Universities Commission will equally see the benefit of the study as it related to co-ordination and development of Nigerian Universities. Basically, the primary objective of the Commission is to ensure the orderly development of university education in Nigeria and to maintain its high standard.
- e. Sustainable development which indicates an all-round development of a nation and its resources depends on quality university education that

transforms a relatively unskilled person to skilled human capital and inquires into various fields of knowledge for the benefit of mankind. The position of the university as a catalyst for sustainable development seems to have been long recognized since the inception of the enterprise during the medieval era (Balogun, 2008).

- f. The importance of the university as a catalyst for sustainable development is heightened now that knowledge as against physical capital is changing the world economy as the source of present and future wealth. Therefore, the wealth or poverty of nations depends on the quality of higher education and knowledge generated within them (World Bank, 2000).
- g. Finally, the study would be helpful to educational researchers. This is because the study will bring innovations to teaching and learning. Hence, the present study is an added resource material for educational purposes as well as reference material for further research.

Conceptual Frameworks

Strategy: It is a set of key decisions made to meet objectives. Strategy refers to a complex web of thoughts, ideas, insights, experiences, goals, expertise, memories, perceptions, and expectations that provides general guidance for specific actions in pursuit of ends. Nations have, in the management of their national policies, found it necessary to evolve strategies that adjust and correlate political, economic, technological, and psychological factors, along with military elements. Be it management of national policies, international relations, or even of a game on the playfield, it provides us with the preferred path that we should take for the journey that we make. According to Upendra (2005) Strategy is a

mediating force between the organization and its environment: consistent patterns in streams of organizational decisions to deal with the environment.

Strategy Process: Strategy process is essentially a decision-making process, involving the rational application of knowledge to a choice problem. A rational process of decision making considers four questions: What are the alternatives? What are the consequences of each alternative? How desirable are the consequences? and What rules or criteria should be employed to choose among the alternatives? (Simon, 1976: 91, March, 1994: 2).

In order to understand the strategy process more fully, research must focus not only upon a single decision but also on the patterns of decisions and *actions* that accumulate over time into a strategy. Strategy process can span long periods of time and traverse multiple levels, bridging the cognitive processes of individual decision makers, the social psychological and political processes within groups of individuals, the organizational rules and routines that guide and constrain the decisions and actions of organizational members, and ecological considerations that affect the survival and success of firms.

Strategy formulation: It is the development of long-range plans for the effective management of environmental opportunities and threats, in light of corporate strengths and weaknesses. It includes defining the corporate mission, specifying achievable objectives, developing strategies and setting policy guidelines. According to David (2005), strategy formulation includes the process of developing a vision and mission, identifying environment analysis for an organization, establishing objectives, generating alternative strategies, and choosing particular strategies to pursue accomplishment. Knowledge strategy formulation describes the way -and actions to achieve objectives. On the other hand, Atairet, Mark and Mbon (2024) describe strategy process as conscious plan

purposely initiated to achieve certain objectives in both private and public sector.

Strategy implementation: is the process by which strategies and policies are put into action through the development of programs, budgets and procedures. This process might involve changes within the overall culture, structure, and/or management system of the entire organization. Most of the times strategy implementation is carried out by middle and lower-level managers with top management's review. Sometimes referred to as operational planning, strategy implementation often involves day-to-day decisions in resource allocation. It includes programs, budgets and procedures.

Strategies for sustainable development: Strategies for sustainable development are a coordinated set of participatory and continuously improving processes of analysis, debate, capacity strengthening, planning and investment, which integrates the economic, social and environmental objectives of society, seeking trade-offs where this is not possible (OECD 2002). Universities in this global age are needed various strategies to incorporate their new technologies into their programme of studies.

Ekpoh, Udoh, and Ogujawa, (2025) posited that technological integration in education is essentially the use of technological tools in the curriculum to meet the teaching-learning process and improve students' learning. Enhancing student involvement, providing access to a multitude of materials, and promoting the growth of digital literacy are benefits that come with incorporating technology into the curriculum. The usage of emerging technologies by educators is vital to their job performance, and the improvement of the effectiveness of teaching and learning process, visa-avis the quality of education. Akpan, Oyakhirome and Udoh (2024) also emphasized that integrating artificial intelligence (AI) in teaching and learning helps students to develop knowledge and

skills needed to pursue careers in technology, data science and other in-demand industries.

It is also essential for developing digital literacy, critical thinking skills, personalized learning skills and preparing students for future academic and career success. It is against this background that the researchers examine the application of artificial intelligence for the management of material and human resources in teaching and learning among universities in south-south geopolitical region of Nigeria. Also, Mbon (2022) contend that, sustainable development is the most crucial part of service delivery in the public sector but unfortunately, cultural as well as environmental factors have retroceded the manifestation of the process in Nigeria governance.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Framework for this study is based on the Resource-Based Theory. The resource-based theory emanates from the principle that the source of firms competitive advantage lies in their internal resources, as opposed to their positioning in the external environment. That is rather than simply evaluating environmental opportunities and threats in conducting business, competitive advantage depends on the unique resources and capabilities that a firm possesses (Barney, 1995). The resource-based approach of the firm predicts that certain types of resources owned and controlled by firms have the potential to generate competitive advantage as well as superior firm performance.

The resource-based approach stipulates that in strategic management the fundamental sources and drivers to firms competitive advantage and superior performance are mainly associated with the attributes of their resources and capabilities which are valuable and costly-to-copy (Peteraf and Bergen, 2003). Firm resources include all assets

(human and materials), capabilities, organisational processes, firm attributes, information, knowledge, etc. controlled by a firm that enable the firm to conceive and implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness (Barney, 1995).

In this study, the resource-based theory of the firms competitive advantage is the underlying theoretical foundation as the study focused on the sustainable development of universities (i.e. resources, capabilities and systems) of the organization towards attaining competitive advantage.

Relevance of the Strategy Process to the Field of Management

Universities are role models of innovation and change and they are expected to play a critical role in promoting sustainable economic, social and cultural development. They are the major drivers of economic knowledge-driven global economy. Thus, the

universities as higher institutions are established to accomplish specified objectives. The university as the bedrock of national development and integration, a leading light and a beacon of scientific breakthrough and technological development and a congregation of intellectuals constantly reproducing itself tends to confirm the assumption that sustainable development is dependent on human capacity. The university is managed and run through an effective committee system for sustainable future. A committee is a group of people with specific roles or experts established to undertake a particular continuing function (Udoh, 2023).

Strategy Process Outcomes

Strategy formulation and strategy implementation when depicted on a matrix form suggests four probable outcomes of the four combinations of variables: Success, roulette, trouble and failure

Strategy Formulation

	Good	Poor
Strategy	Success	Roulette
Implementation	Trouble	Failure

- **Success** is the most likely outcome when an organization has a good strategy and implements it well. In this case, all that can be done to ensure success has been done. Environmental factors outside the company's control such as competitive reactions or customer changes may still make a strategy unsuccessful. However, organizational objectives have the best chance of being achieved in this cell.
- **Roulette** involves situations wherein a poorly formulated strategy is

implemented well. Two basic outcomes may ensue. The good execution may overcome the poor strategy or at least give management an early warning of impending failure. Perhaps the field sales force recognizes a problem in the strategy and changes its selling approach to a more successful one. Alternatively, the same good execution can hasten the failure of the poor strategy. Thus, it is impossible to predict exactly what will happen to strategies in the roulette cell, and that where it gets its name.

- **The trouble** cell is characterized by situations wherein a well-formulated strategy is poorly implemented. Because managers are more accustomed to focusing on strategy formulation, the real problem with the strategy faulty implementation-is often not diagnosed. When things go wrong, managers are likely to reformulate the strategy rather than question whether the implementation was effective. The new (and often less appropriate) strategy is then re-implemented and continues to fail.
- **Failure** is the most likely to occur when a poorly formulated strategy is poorly implemented. In these situations, management has great difficulty getting back on the right track. If the same strategy is retained and implemented in a different way, it is still likely to fail. If the strategy is reformulated and implemented the same way, failure remains the probable result. Strategic problems in this cell of the matrix are very difficult to diagnose and remedy. The analysis of the matrix makes two things clear.

- ❖ First, strategy implementation is at least as important as strategy formulation.
- ❖ Second, the quality of a formulated strategy is difficult to assess in the absence of effective implementation.

Functional Strategy

Strategy process involves determining appropriate courses of action for achieving objectives. In the process of formulation, it is necessary to gear the organization in such a way that all the functional areas are synchronized viz, finance, marketing, human resources and operations. Off late logistics is

also included as a key functional area. Further the functional strategies must cover all the three levels of management top, middle and lower. It is in this context that we need to present functional strategies in detail at the conference.

Conclusion

The study concluded that there are based innovative funding strategies which have been recognized to be effective in reversing the lingering problem of underfunding in South-south Nigerian universities. To this end, university management should be ready to adopt the innovative strategies to improve on funding the universities.

Recommendations

- i. All stakeholders must be involved in the provision of university education through integrated approach to university education finance.
- ii. Development partners should be encouraged as they have great potentials to bring in significant resources to the Universities. Well-to-do individuals should endow Universities and fund their research.
- iii. Knowledge, based on good research, is necessary if policies are to be thoughtfully planned and implemented. Locally focused research and analysis will enhance the generation of sound or viable strategies to tackle challenges.

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