



VISIONARY LEADERSHIP AND PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN NAIROBI CITY COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Education is a cornerstone of national development, acting as a catalyst for social, economic, and political progress. Despite their critical importance, the performance of public universities in Nairobi City County has been on a decline, as evidenced by key performance indicators such as admission rates, graduation rates, and customer satisfaction levels. The general objective of the study is to determine influence of visionary leadership on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to establish the influence of Strategic Thinking on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya and to examine the influence of Employee Motivation on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Descriptive survey design was used in the study. The total population of the study was taken as 1428. The population of the study included senior officers, HR officers, ICT officers and general staff working at min campuses of public universities in Kenya. That is, University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Multi Media University, JKUAT, Technical University of Kenya and Cooperative University College of Kenya. The study was restricted to selected public universities in Kenya because of convenience with data collection. The study used Yamane formula to calculate the sample size. From Yamane formula, the sample size was 313 respondents representing 21.9% of the target population. The study used stratified random sampling method to select the sample. The study used questionnaires to collect data from respondents. The data collected was edited, coded and entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21 which also aided in the data analysis. This study generated quantitative data. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study results were presented through use of tables and figures. The study concludes that strategic thinking has a positive and significant effect on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. In addition, the study concludes that employee motivation has a positive and significant effect on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Based on the findings, the study recommends that public universities in Kenya should institutionalize strategic foresight as part of their planning processes. By systematically analyzing trends, anticipating future challenges, and aligning long-term goals with dynamic educational demands, universities can proactively position themselves for success. Further, the study recommends that public universities in Kenya should cultivate a supportive work environment that encourages and rewards employee creativity.

Key Words: Visionary Leadership, Strategic Thinking, Employee Motivation, Performance Of Public Universities

Background of the Study

Public universities are higher education institutions that are primarily funded and operated by government entities, such as national, state, or local governments (Furkan *et al*, 2020). These universities offer a wide range of academic programs and degrees, often at more affordable tuition rates compared to private institutions, due to government funding. The primary goal of public universities is to provide accessible and quality education to a diverse student population while also contributing to research, innovation, and community development (Dhammika, 2020). As publicly funded institutions, they are typically subject to government regulations and policies, and their funding is derived from taxes and other public revenue sources.

Public universities play a fundamental role in providing accessible, affordable higher education to a diverse range of students (Colette, Cassey & Kate, 2020). By being primarily funded by government sources, they offer lower tuition rates compared to private institutions, making higher education more attainable for individuals from various socioeconomic backgrounds. This accessibility helps promote social mobility, allowing students from different communities to pursue degrees and careers that may have otherwise been out of reach (Ghufran, 2021). As a result, public universities contribute significantly to narrowing educational inequalities and fostering an educated, skilled workforce.

Beyond education, public universities are key drivers of research and innovation. They are often at the forefront of scientific, technological, and social research, addressing critical issues such as climate change, public health, economic inequality, and more (Miharja & Hayati, 2021). Research conducted at these institutions not only contributes to the advancement of knowledge but also supports local, national, and global economies. Public universities collaborate with industries, governments, and nonprofits, translating academic research into real-world applications, fostering innovation, and creating job opportunities (Muziwandile, 2019). This dual role of teaching and research enables them to be engines of economic development and societal progress.

Public universities also serve as important cultural and intellectual centers. They offer platforms for diverse viewpoints, critical thinking, and public discourse through academic programs, public lectures, and cultural events (Zita, 2020). They create spaces for intellectual exchange where students, faculty, and the community can engage with ideas that challenge conventional thinking and encourage creativity. Additionally, these institutions often serve as community anchors, providing resources like healthcare services, cultural programming, and adult education, which benefit society at large (Usman & Halimah, 2019).

Public universities help shape public policy and social change. Many universities are involved in policy research and advocacy, working closely with lawmakers, public institutions, and citizens to address pressing societal issues (Rubamba, 2022). By training future leaders, educators, and professionals, they help cultivate individuals who will shape the direction of government, business, and civil society. In essence, public universities play a vital role in both the intellectual and practical aspects of societal development, supporting the broader mission of creating a more educated, equitable, and progressive society (Abdullahi, Tijani & Sofoluwe, 2020).

Visionary leadership refers to the ability of a leader to inspire and guide others toward a future vision by creating a clear, compelling picture of what could be achieved (Wekesa & Omariba, 2024). Visionary leaders possess the foresight to identify opportunities, challenges, and trends, and they communicate their vision in a way that motivates and energizes their team or organization. These leaders are forward-thinking, embracing innovation and change while staying focused on long-term goals (Simiyu, Wanyama & Aliata, 2022). They foster a sense of purpose and direction, encouraging creativity and collaboration to turn ambitious ideas into reality. Visionary leadership is often associated with transformative change, as these leaders

challenge the status quo and inspire others to take bold actions that align with a greater mission or purpose.

Visionary leadership is deeply connected to strategic thinking, as it requires leaders to not only have a clear vision for the future but also the ability to plan and execute long-term goals (Njeri, Severina & Paul, 2023). Strategic thinking involves analyzing the current landscape, anticipating potential challenges, and identifying opportunities for growth and innovation. A visionary leader is forward-thinking, focusing on the bigger picture while ensuring that every decision aligns with the organization's overall mission and vision (Huma, Nduku & Mwalw'a, 2022). By setting clear, strategic goals, these leaders can guide their teams with purpose, ensuring that their efforts contribute to achieving the desired future outcomes. This kind of leadership helps organizations stay ahead of the curve, positioning them for sustainable success in a dynamic, competitive environment (Koech & Namusonge, 2020).

A key aspect of visionary leadership is its ability to motivate employees by providing them with a sense of purpose and direction. Visionary leaders create an inspiring environment where employees understand not only their individual roles but also how their work contributes to the larger vision of the organization (Furkan *et al*, 2020). By communicating a compelling future, these leaders make employees feel part of something meaningful, which fosters a sense of pride and commitment. Motivation is also driven by the leader's ability to recognize and celebrate achievements, empowering employees to push beyond their limits and take ownership of their work. When employees feel aligned with the organization's long-term goals, they are more likely to remain engaged, productive, and motivated (Dhammika, 2020).

Creativity is another essential component of visionary leadership, as these leaders encourage innovation and new ideas to help realize their vision. A visionary leader creates an environment where employees feel empowered to think outside the box and experiment with new approaches (Colette, Cassey & Kate, 2020). By supporting risk-taking and allowing for failure as part of the creative process, these leaders foster a culture of continuous improvement. Encouraging creativity allows the organization to adapt, innovate, and stay relevant in an ever-changing market. Visionary leaders also provide the resources, tools, and autonomy needed for employees to explore novel ideas, thereby unlocking their full potential and driving organizational innovation (Ghufran, 2021).

Effective communication is at the heart of visionary leadership, as leaders must clearly articulate their vision and the steps needed to achieve it. Visionary leaders excel in communicating with their teams, ensuring that everyone understands the organization's goals and their role in achieving them (Muziwandile, 2019). They also actively listen to feedback from employees, making communication a two-way process (Rubamba, 2022). This open exchange helps build trust, align objectives, and ensure that the vision is understood and embraced at every level of the organization. Additionally, visionary leaders maintain transparency in their communications, particularly during times of change, to minimize uncertainty and keep the team focused on long-term goals (Zita, 2020). Strong organizational communication also facilitates collaboration, ensures that teams work toward common objectives, and strengthens the collective effort needed to achieve the vision.

Wekesa and Omariba (2024) revealed that that visionary leadership had a significant positive effect on service delivery. The study concluded that visionary leadership is essential for enhancing service delivery, and the organizational structure acts as a moderator in the relationship between strategic leadership and service delivery. Simiyu, Wanyama and Aliata (2022) found that strategic leadership had a significant positive influence on service delivery. The study concluded that visionary leadership had significant influence on the service delivery in the County Government of Busia.

Njeri, Severina and Paul (2023) revealed that visionary leadership principals relied on the directives that the Ministry of Education had towards empowering their leadership capabilities. Therefore, the study noted little professional advancement of staff working in the accounts office which was attributed to a failure of principals to push for the same, fearing that the staff may leave the school for greener pastures after the training. The study concluded that visionary leadership was key to the success of any learning institution in Kenya.

Huma, Nduku and Mwalw'a (2022) found that visionary leadership has an effect on the implementation of change management strategies in the private secondary schools. The study also established that holding other factors constant, a unit increase in visionary factors would lead to a positive unit increase in implementation of change management strategies. The study concluded that visionary leadership has an effect on the implementation of change management strategies in the private secondary schools.

Koech and Namusonge (2020) found that leadership style is characterized by avoidant leaders who may either not intervene in the work affairs of subordinates or may completely avoid responsibilities as a superior and is unlikely to put in effort to build a relationship with them. The study concluded that leadership style is directly linked to organization performance of any institution.

Statement of the Problem

Education is a cornerstone of national development, acting as a catalyst for social, economic, and political progress (Huma, Nduku & Mwalw'a, 2022). At its apex, university education fosters advanced knowledge creation, critical thinking, and innovative problem-solving that are essential for driving sustainable growth and global competitiveness (Wekesa, & Omariba, 2024). Public universities, in particular, play a pivotal role in providing accessible, affordable, and quality higher education to a broad demographic, shaping a skilled and knowledgeable workforce (Miharja, & Hayati, 2021). In Kenya, public universities are integral to producing the professionals and leaders necessary for addressing national challenges and achieving Vision 2030 (Colette, Cassey, & Kate, 2020). However, their capacity to fulfill this mission depends significantly on institutional performance, which is intricately linked to leadership quality (Dhammika, 2020).

Despite their critical importance, the performance of public universities in Nairobi City County has been on a decline, as evidenced by key performance indicators such as admission rates, graduation rates, and customer satisfaction levels (Mwabu, & Were, 2019). Recent statistics reveal a worrying trend: the admission rate in public universities has dropped by 15% between 2018 and 2023, largely due to financial constraints and inadequate facilities (Muogbo, 2020). Furthermore, the graduation rate has stagnated at approximately 55%, reflecting challenges such as insufficient mentorship, extended program durations, and low student retention rates (Gichure, 2020). Additionally, customer satisfaction, which includes students' perceptions of learning environments and service delivery, has also diminished, with surveys indicating satisfaction levels as low as 45% in some institutions (Ongalo, & Tari, 2020). These challenges underscore the urgent need for visionary leadership to realign institutional goals, enhance operational efficiency, and improve the overall quality of education provided by public universities. Without such leadership, the institutions risk further erosion of their critical role in national development (Oloo, Opio, & Ongeti, 2021).

Various studies have been conducted in different parts of the world on visionary leadership and organization performance (Naftary, Mwaura & Waweru, 2023). For instance, Lolkithekui, Ole-Sopia and Munga (2019) conducted a case study on factors influencing strategic thinking among master of business administration graduates, Mathinji and Waithaka (2019) investigated on strategic thinking and performance of milk processing firms and Ongalo and Tari (2020) researched on effect of employee motivation strategies on organizational performance: a case

of electricity generating and distribution firms in Kenya (Wekesa & Omariba, 2024). However, none of these studies focused on visionary leadership on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County (Ndei & Ngugi, 2022). To fill the highlighted gaps, the current study sought to determine the influence of visionary leadership on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County.

General Objective

The general objective of the study is to determine the influence of visionary leadership on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Specific Objectives

- i. To establish the influence of strategic thinking on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya
- ii. To examine the influence of employee motivation on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya

Theoretical Review

Goal Setting Theory

Goal Setting Theory, developed by psychologist Edwin Locke (1968), suggests that setting specific and challenging goals leads to higher performance compared to vague or easy goals (Vishalni *et al*, 2021). According to this theory, clear, well-defined goals provide individuals with direction and focus, enhancing motivation and effort. The theory emphasizes that goals should be both challenging and attainable, as difficult goals push individuals to exert greater effort, while the right level of difficulty maintains engagement and prevents frustration (Olota, Ayoola & Balogun, 2021). One key component of Goal Setting Theory is the idea that goals should be specific and measurable. Vague or abstract goals, such as "do your best" or "improve," can lack direction, making it harder for individuals to focus their efforts (Lolkitekui, Ole-Sopia & Munga, 2019). Specific goals, on the other hand, give individuals a clear target to aim for, enhancing motivation and guiding decision-making. For example, a goal like "increase sales by 15% within the next quarter" is more effective than a goal like "increase sales." Specificity helps individuals prioritize their actions and monitor their progress (Mathinji & Waithaka, 2019).

Another crucial element is goal difficulty. Locke's research suggests that goals should be challenging, but not impossible to achieve. Moderately difficult goals tend to motivate individuals more effectively than easy or overly difficult ones (Oloo, Opio & Ongeti, 2022). This is because challenging goals create a sense of achievement when accomplished and often require individuals to push beyond their usual limits (Olota, Ayoola & Balogun, 2021). However, goals that are too difficult can lead to frustration and a lack of motivation, so it's important to find a balance that maintains both challenge and attainability. Feedback is also central to Goal Setting Theory. Regular feedback allows individuals to track their progress, understand how well they are performing, and adjust their strategies if necessary (Vishalni *et al*, 2021). Positive feedback reinforces behaviors that lead toward goal achievement, while constructive feedback helps identify areas for improvement. In the absence of feedback, individuals may feel uncertain about their progress and become demotivated, as they have little to gauge whether their efforts are leading to success (Lolkitekui, Ole-Sopia & Munga (2019).

Goal Setting Theory is based on several key assumptions that shape its application and effectiveness. One of the primary assumptions is that individuals are motivated by clear goals. The theory assumes that setting specific and challenging goals can direct attention, increase effort, and sustain persistence in the pursuit of those goals (Vishalni *et al*, 2021). Another assumption is that people are capable of setting and achieving goals as long as they have the

necessary skills and resources. The theory assumes that individuals will exert effort proportional to the difficulty of the goal, as long as the goal is perceived as attainable. Goal Setting Theory assumes that feedback plays a critical role in goal achievement (Olota, Ayoola & Balogun, 2021). It presumes that individuals need to receive regular updates on their progress to stay motivated and make adjustments to their efforts. The theory also assumes that goals should be aligned with individual values and organizational objectives, creating a sense of ownership and intrinsic motivation. Finally, it assumes that the relationship between goal setting and performance is linear; as goals become more specific and difficult, performance increases.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, introduced by psychologist Abraham Maslow in 1943, is a motivational theory that suggests human needs can be organized into a five-level pyramid (Irum *et al*, 2020). The theory proposes that individuals must satisfy lower-level needs before progressing to higher-level ones. These needs are categorized into physiological needs, safety needs, love and belongingness needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (Muogbo, 2020). Maslow's model is often depicted as a pyramid, with physiological needs at the base and self-actualization at the top, reflecting the priority that must be given to each level in order for individuals to feel motivated. The base of Maslow's hierarchy consists of physiological needs, which are the fundamental requirements for human survival (Mwabu & Were, 2019). These include the need for air, food, water, shelter, and sleep. Without satisfying these basic needs, an individual cannot focus on higher-level goals or desires. Once physiological needs are met, individuals can then focus on fulfilling their safety needs, which include physical safety, financial security, health, and protection from harm. Safety needs encompass both external and internal security, such as a stable job, a safe living environment, and personal well-being (Ongalo & Tari, 2020).

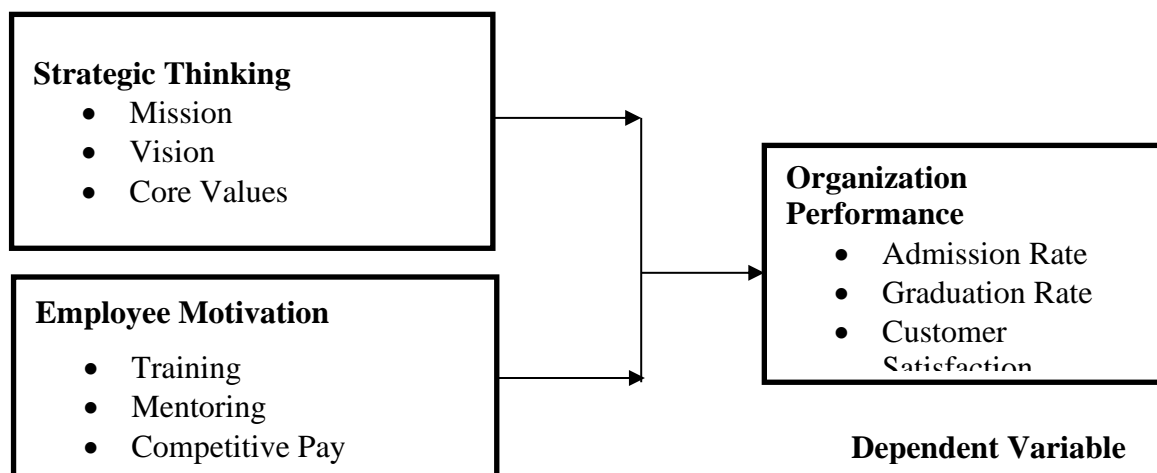
Next in the hierarchy are love and belongingness needs, which reflect the human desire for social connections and relationships. This level involves the need for intimate relationships, friendships, family connections, and a sense of belonging within a community (Gichure, 2020). After these social needs are satisfied, individuals move to the esteem needs, which involve the desire for self-respect, recognition, and the respect of others. Esteem needs are categorized into two types: lower esteem needs, which include the need for status, recognition, and appreciation, and higher esteem needs, which relate to self-confidence, personal competence, and the feeling of achievement (Irum *et al*, 2020). At the top of Maslow's hierarchy is self-actualization, which is the realization of an individual's full potential and the pursuit of personal growth, creativity, and self-improvement. Self-actualization refers to becoming the best version of oneself, seeking personal fulfillment, and engaging in activities that promote one's growth and purpose in life (Muogbo, 2020). According to Maslow, this need is never fully satisfied; instead, individuals continuously strive for self-improvement and the realization of their personal goals and values.

Another assumption is that needs are universal—applicable to all humans regardless of culture or background (Muogbo, 2020). While Maslow recognized that different societies may prioritize different needs or pursue them in different ways, he assumed that all people experience the same basic needs in a similar order. For example, physiological needs will always come before safety needs, and safety needs must be met before people can focus on relationships or self-esteem. Maslow's theory assumes that people are motivated to move upward through the hierarchy as they meet their basic needs (Mwabu & Were, 2019). This assumption holds that once lower-level needs are sufficiently satisfied, individuals will naturally seek to fulfill higher-level needs, such as social connection, self-esteem, and self-

actualization. The progression is seen as a linear process, where individuals prioritize and focus on different needs at various stages of life (Ongalo & Tari, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a structured, visual, or written representation that outlines the key concepts, variables, and their relationships within a study or project. The figure below shows the independent variables and the dependent variable. In this study the Independent variables include; Strategic Thinking and Employee Motivation while the dependent variable is performance of public universities in Nairobi City County



Independent Variables

Figure 2. 1: Conceptual Framework

Strategic Thinking

Strategic Thinking refers to the process of considering and planning long-term goals and actions in a way that aligns with an organization's overall objectives and vision (Vishalni *et al*, 2021). It involves the ability to analyze complex situations, anticipate future challenges or opportunities, and develop creative solutions that provide a competitive advantage. Strategic thinking is forward-looking, focusing on both the big picture and the finer details, and it requires a combination of analytical skills, creativity, and foresight (Olota, Ayoola & Balogun, 2021).

The mission of an organization defines its core purpose and primary objectives. It articulates why the organization exists and what it seeks to achieve in the present. The mission statement typically outlines the organization's key functions, target audience, and the value it aims to deliver (Lolkitekui, Ole-Sopia & Munga, 2019). It serves as a guiding principle for decision-making, helping employees align their actions with the broader goals of the organization. A strong mission statement is clear, concise, and focused, offering direction and motivation for both internal and external stakeholders. It also acts as a benchmark for assessing the success of the organization's activities and initiatives. Ultimately, the mission reflects the organization's commitment to its goals and its role within the community or market it serves (Mathinji & Waithaka, 2019).

The vision of an organization is a forward-looking statement that describes the future aspirations and long-term goals of the organization (Oloo, Opio & Ongeti, 2022). It paints a picture of what the organization hopes to become or achieve in the future, often aiming to inspire and motivate employees and stakeholders. The vision statement provides a sense of purpose and direction, helping guide strategic decisions and initiatives that align with future

ambitions. While the mission focuses on the present, the vision looks ahead to what success will look like in the long run. A compelling vision is often aspirational and visionary, challenging the organization to strive for greatness, innovate, and grow (Olota, Ayoola & Balogun, 2021). It serves as a motivational tool, creating a shared sense of purpose that unites people toward a common future goal.

Core values are the fundamental beliefs and principles that guide an organization's actions, decisions, and behaviors. They define the organization's culture, shaping how employees interact with each other, how they engage with customers, and how they make decisions (Vishalni *et al*, 2021). Core values often reflect the ethical standards, priorities, and overall philosophy of the organization. These values provide a moral compass, helping to ensure that all actions taken by the organization are consistent with its identity and mission. Core values are often embedded in organizational practices and influence everything from leadership styles to day-to-day operations (Lolkitekui, Ole-Sopia & Munga (2019). By defining and living by its core values, an organization cultivates a positive work culture, fosters trust among employees, and builds strong relationships with customers and stakeholders.

Employee Motivation

Employee motivation refers to the level of energy, commitment, and enthusiasm that employees bring to their work (Irum *et al*, 2020). It is the internal drive that influences individuals to achieve goals, perform tasks effectively, and contribute positively to the success of an organization. Motivated employees are typically more engaged, productive, and willing to go above and beyond in their roles. Factors influencing employee motivation include intrinsic rewards (such as personal satisfaction, a sense of purpose, and opportunities for growth), extrinsic rewards (such as salary, benefits, and recognition), and the work environment (such as company culture, leadership, and work-life balance) (Muogbo, 2020).

Training refers to the process of developing employees' skills, knowledge, and competencies to perform their roles effectively and efficiently (Mwabu & Were, 2019). It is a key aspect of employee development and organizational growth. Training can take various forms, including on-the-job training, workshops, seminars, e-learning, or formal education programs. By investing in training, organizations equip their workforce with the tools and capabilities necessary to meet evolving industry standards, adopt new technologies, and handle challenges in their roles (Ongalo & Tari, 2020). Effective training programs not only enhance individual performance but also contribute to overall organizational success by improving productivity, reducing errors, and increasing employee confidence. In addition, training fosters a culture of continuous learning, helping employees to grow within their careers and adapt to changes in the workplace (Gichure, 2020).

Mentoring is a relationship-based development process where a more experienced or senior employee (the mentor) provides guidance, support, and advice to a less experienced individual (the mentee) to help them navigate their career or personal growth within the organization (Irum *et al*, 2020). Unlike formal training, mentoring is typically a one-on-one, long-term relationship that focuses on providing wisdom, encouragement, and perspective rather than specific skills. Through mentoring, employees can gain valuable insights into organizational culture, career development, leadership, and decision-making (Muogbo, 2020). A mentor's role is not only to offer advice but also to challenge and motivate the mentee to achieve their potential. Mentoring is highly beneficial for building strong employee relationships, fostering leadership development, and retaining talent, as it provides mentees with the support they need to succeed and advance within the organization (Mwabu & Were, 2019).

Competitive pay refers to offering employees compensation that is on par with, or exceeds, what is offered by other organizations within the same industry or geographic location (Ongalo & Tari, 2020). It is an important aspect of talent acquisition and retention, as it helps

organizations attract and keep high-performing individuals. Competitive pay typically includes a base salary, bonuses, commissions, and other financial incentives, and it reflects the value that an organization places on its employees' skills and contributions (Gichure, 2020). In addition to financial compensation, competitive pay may also include benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid time off. By offering competitive pay, organizations signal to employees that their work is valued and that the organization is committed to supporting their well-being. Competitive compensation helps boost morale, reduces turnover, and motivates employees to perform at their best, knowing they are fairly compensated for their efforts (Irum *et al*, 2020).

Empirical Review

Strategic Thinking and Organization Performance

Vishalini *et al* (2021) determined the impact of leadership style on ethical decision-making, the moderating role of strategic thinking: a study among Malaysian managers. This study develops and empirically tests a multilevel model of cross-level interactions between leadership style and ethical decision-making at the individual level. The study also examines the moderating role of strategic thinking support in the proposed cross-level relationships. Data were collected from 389 managers of electrical and electronic (E&E) companies in Penang. Results confirmed the relationship between leadership style and ethical decision-making. Additionally, strategic thinking was found to perform the moderating role between leadership style and ethical decision-making. The study concluded that strategic thinking perform the moderating role between leadership style and ethical decision-making.

Olota, Ayoola and Balogun (2021) assessed the impact of strategic thinking on organizational performance in Nigeria Mega-Supermarket. A structured questionnaire was used to obtain primary data from the employees of the organization. One hundred and fifty-seven questionnaires were administered out of which one hundred and fifty were properly filled and returned. The findings of the study revealed that; vision-driven thinking has a significant effect on corporate performance creative thinking is significantly related to employee's productivity; that market-oriented thinking has an effect on employee efficiency. Hence, the study concluded that strategic thinking has a significant effect on organization performance since the majority of the variables are statistically significant with one another.

Lolkitekui, Ole-Sopia and Munga (2019) conducted a case study on factors influencing strategic thinking among master of business administration graduates in Kenya: A survey of university campuses in Nairobi Central Business District. Descriptive survey was employed on a sample size of 54 respondents obtained using snowball sampling method was used. The findings revealed that the multiple linear regression model developed for the study could explain quite a number of the variations on strategic thinking among MBA graduates from Kenyan universities campuses located in Nairobi County. The study, therefore, concluded that the management of the universities invests in more resources that can make their programs more oriented to strategic thinking.

Mathinji and Waithaka (2019) investigated on strategic thinking and performance of milk processing firms in Nyeri County, Kenya. The study targeted all five milk processing firms that collect process and market milk products in Nyeri County. The respondents of the study were the entire top management of the milk processing firms that comprised of some 76 officers. Questionnaires were the data collection tools used in the study. The questionnaires were administered using drop and pick method. The study found that strategic thinking had a positive and significant effect on the performance of milk processing firms in Nyeri County. Refinement of competitive strategies had the largest positive effect on performance while re-designing of business processes had the least but positive effect on the performance of milk

processing firms in Nyeri County. The study concluded that strategic thinking had significant and positive effects on the performance of milk processing firms in Nyeri County.

Oloo, Opio and Ongeti (2022) researched on strategic thinking and the performance of land administration function in Kenya. The study used quantitative research methods. The target population was 2880 staffs who work on land administration in various departments in the Ministry of Lands and the National Land Commission and sampled customers who access land administration services in 5 selected Counties. By use of a stratified random sampling method, a sample size of 351 was arrived at and selected. In addition, the research employed document analysis at the respective headquarters of the National Land Commission and the Ministry of Lands and Physical Planning. The study revealed that strategic thinking has positive significant effect on performance of the land administration function in Kenya. The study concluded that strategic thinking has a positive and statistically significant effect on the performance of the land administration function in Kenya. Hypothesis-driven, thinking in time, intelligent opportunism, and purpose focused has an effect on performance of the land administration function in Kenya.

Employee Motivation and Organization Performance

Irum *et al* (2020) researched on the impact of employee motivation on employee performance in Pakistan. Data is collected from 160 teachers of Government and private schools by using self-administered questionnaire. Regression analysis is applied to find the effect of employee motivation on employee's performance involving four variables employee motivation, employee performance, intrinsic rewards and employee perceived training effectiveness. The results of this study show that significant and positive relationship exists between employee motivation and employee performance. It is also concluded that intrinsic rewards has a significant positive relationship with employee performance and employee motivation. This study concluded that employee perceived training effectiveness has a negative relationship with motivation.

Muogbo (2020) determined the impact of employee motivation on organisational performance (a study of some selected firms in Anambra State Nigeria). 103 respondents selected from 17 manufacturing firms across the three senatorial zones of Anambra State. The population of the study was 120 workers of selected manufacturing firms in Anambra State. The study used descriptive statistics (frequencies, mean, and percentages) to answer three research questions posed for the study. The result obtained from the analysis showed that there existed relationship between employee motivation and the organizational performance. The study reveals that extrinsic motivation given to workers in an organization has a significant influence on the workers performance. The study concluded that s that fairness in the remuneration package tends to produce higher performance from workers.

Mwabu and Were (2019) researched on the influence of employee motivation on performance in selected research institutions in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The target population was management personnel: directors, middle-level management managers, and lower-level managers from Kenya Agricultural & Livestock Research Organization and Kenya Medical Research Institute. The target interviewees were 356 respondents, of whom 96 were from Kenya Agricultural & Livestock Research Organization and 260 from Kenya Medical Research Institute. A total of 51 respondents were sampled from Kenya Agricultural & Livestock Research Organization and 137 respondents were sampled from Kenya Medical Research Institute, comprising a sample size of 188. The study findings indicated that reward management, career growth, work environment and training and development have a positive and significant influence on performance. The study findings led to the conclusion that an increase in reward management practices such as salary, allowances, benefits and bonuses increase in performance.

Ongalo and Tari (2020) researched on effect of employee motivation strategies on organizational performance: a case of electricity generating and distribution firms in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. With a target population of four electricity generating and distribution firms based in Nairobi. Comprising of management level, middle level and the lower level in the organizations. The study used frequency tables, charts, percentages and graphical illustration to provide information on key variables as well as the means and standard deviations for the responses on the effect of motivation on organizational performance questionnaires. The study found that electricity generating and distribution firms lacked clear policies governing training and development, the electricity distribution firms had failed to match their reward and recognition benefits with current economic status and that there lacked an adequate employee benefits package which all had a negative effect on organizational performance in electricity generating and distribution firms. The study concluded that Employee Motivation Strategies has a great impact on Organizational Performance of electricity generating and distribution firms.

Gichure (2020) examined the factors influencing employee motivation and its impact on employee performance: a case of AMREF Health Africa in Kenya. A descriptive research design was adopted, with Amref Health Africa in Kenya being the focus organization. The populations for the study were employees of Amref Health Africa in Kenya since this is the organization under study. The study population comprised a total of 412 employees from various functions. Stratified random sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 96 respondents. The data collection instrument was a tailor-made structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, specifically for this study. The key findings of the study were that the extrinsic factors affect the achievement aspects of employee motivation and the affiliation motivation as well as the competence motivation. These extrinsic factors include, work condition, pay, fringe benefits and the work environment among others. Furthermore, the extrinsic factors are fundamental in influencing the employee to strive at achieving the set goals by efficiently performing the necessary tasks. The concluded that employee motivation is a highly sensitive concept which is affected by a multiplicity of factors. Some of these factors are extrinsic in that they emerge from within the organization and are an external imposition on the employee. The study also asserts that the issue of motivation as personal or inherent factor in an employee predisposes and employee to develop a certain mind set regarding their jobs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Research design refers to how the researcher would put a research study together to answer a set of questions (Williams, 2019). Research design works as a systematic plan outlining the study, the researchers' methods of compilation, details on how the study arrived at its conclusions and the limitations of the research. Research design may incorporate both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The descriptive survey design optimizes on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2019). Descriptive survey design was used in the study to describe the characteristics of certain groups, estimate the proportion with certain characteristics and make predictions.

Target Population

The total population of the study was taken as 1428. The population of the study included senior officers, HR officers, ICT officers and general staff working at min campuses of public universities in Kenya. That is, University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Multi Media University, JKUAT, Technical University of Kenya and Cooperative University College of Kenya. The study was restricted to selected public universities in Kenya because of convenience with data collection. The five universities have 344 senior officers which included

chief executive, directors and departmental heads. Human Resource Officers were 252 and ICT officers were 145. Randomly select 687 general staff from the universities were included.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size, the following formula was calculated using formula provided by Yamane (1967). At 95% level of confidence the sample size, the following formula was used to calculate the sample size.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;

N = Number of study population (1428)

n = Sample size

e = Error term (5%)

$$1 + 1427(0.05^2)$$

$$= 312.6 \approx 313$$

From Yamane formula, the sample size was 313 respondents representing 21.9% of the target population. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2019), for any significant study, 10-30% of the target population would give an adequate sample size. Mugenda and Mugenda (2018) also recommend that at least 10% of the population is a good representation where the population is large and 30%, where the population is small.

The study used stratified random sampling method to select the sample. Ritchie and Lewis (2019) stated that stratified sampling ensures a high degree of representativeness of all the strata or layers in the population. The study therefore selected a sample of 21.9% from each category.

Data Collection Instruments

The study used questionnaires to collect data from respondents. The structured (closed-ended) questionnaires were used to get uniform responses from respondents. The structured questionnaires was accompanied by a list of all possible alternatives from which respondents selected the suitable answer that described their situation by simply ticking Mugenda and Mugenda (2019)

Pilot Test

Pilot test was conducted to detect weakness in design and instrumentation and to provide alternative data for selection of a probability sample (Mugenda & Mugenda 2019). A pre-test of the questionnaire was done prior to the actual data collection. The developed questionnaire was checked for its validity and reliability through pilot testing. The research intends to subject the questionnaire to 31 respondents to participate in the pilot study which represents 10% of the target population. According to O'Sullivan *et al.* (2019), the authors state that investigators should conduct a pilot study, that is, a small study to test the adequacy of a data collection instrument or procedure. If they fail to do so, the survey instruments might also ignore relevant variables. Pilot studies are conducted to test the entire research process usually from a methodological standpoint in actual field conditions. Pilot studies identify potential problems throughout the entire survey procedure and assess whether the project is feasible, realistic and rational from start to finish (Ruel, Wagner & Gillespie, 2019).

Data Processing and Analysis

The data collected was edited, coded and entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21 which also aided in the data analysis. This study is expected to generate qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were adopted for the study. The quantitative data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics which included frequency distribution tables and measures of central tendency (the mean), measures of variability (standard deviation) and measures of relative frequencies. The inferential statistics included correlation analysis and regression analysis. A regression model was used to establish the relationship between variables. The quantitative data was presented using tables, charts and graphs. The qualitative data generated from the open-ended questions was categorized in themes in accordance with research objectives and reported in prose form along with quantitative presentation.

The model took the form:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \chi_1 + \beta_2 \chi_2 + \varepsilon$$

Where: Y = Performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya

χ_1 = Strategic Thinking

χ_2 = Employee Motivation

β_0 = the constant

β_{1-n} = the regression coefficient or change included in Y by each χ

ε = error term

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Strategic Thinking and Organization Performance

The first specific objective of the study was to establish the influence of strategic thinking on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on statements relating to strategic thinking and performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The results were as presented in Table 4.1.

From the results, the respondents agreed that the university's strategic thinking process has helped refine its mission to better reflect the needs of the community and stakeholders (M=3.903, SD=0.918). In addition, the respondents agreed that the university's mission is regularly reviewed and updated based on the strategic goals set by leadership (M=3.897, SD=0.867). Further, the respondents agreed that strategic thinking has played a key role in shaping the university's long-term vision for growth and development (M=3.890, SD=0.745).

From the results, the respondents agreed that the university's vision is aligned with the evolving needs of the higher education sector and society (M=3.880, SD= 0.669). In addition, the university's core values have been defined and refined through strategic thinking to reflect the institution's priorities (M=3.770, SD=0.695). Further, strategic thinking has ensured that the university's core values are effectively integrated into daily operations and decision-making (M=3.682, SD=0.603).

Table 4. 1: Strategic Thinking and Organization Performance

	Mean	Std. Dev.
The university's strategic thinking process has helped refine its mission to better reflect the needs of the community and stakeholders.	3.903	0.918
The university's mission is regularly reviewed and updated based on the strategic goals set by leadership.	3.897	0.867
Strategic thinking has played a key role in shaping the university's long-term vision for growth and development.	3.890	0.745
The university's vision is aligned with the evolving needs of the higher education sector and society.	3.880	0.669
The university's core values have been defined and refined through strategic thinking to reflect the institution's priorities.	3.770	0.695
Strategic thinking has ensured that the university's core values are effectively integrated into daily operations and decision-making.	3.682	0.603
Aggregate	3.837	0.750

Employee Motivation and Organization Performance

The second specific objective of the study was to examine the influence of employee motivation on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements relating to employee motivation and performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The results were as shown in Table 4.2. From the results, the respondents agreed that the university provides adequate training opportunities that enhance employee skills and contribute to improved performance ($M=3.887$, $SD=0.851$). In addition, the respondents agreed that employee motivation at the university is positively influenced by access to regular and relevant training programs ($M=3.755$, $SD=0.630$). Further, the respondents agreed that the mentoring programs at the university effectively contribute to employee motivation and job satisfaction ($M=3.748$, $SD=0.730$). From the results, the respondents also agreed that employees are motivated by the opportunity to receive mentorship from experienced colleagues or leaders at the university ($M=3.683$, $SD=0.695$). In addition, the respondents agreed that competitive pay at the university significantly contributes to employee motivation and job satisfaction ($M=3.626$, $SD=0.668$). Further, the respondents agreed that the university's pay structure is competitive compared to other public universities in Nairobi City County ($M=3.618$, $SD=0.710$).

Table 4. 2: Employee Motivation and Organization Performance

	Mean	Std. Dev.
The university provides adequate training opportunities that enhance employee skills and contribute to improved performance.	3.887	0.851
Employee motivation at the university is positively influenced by access to regular and relevant training programs.	3.755	0.630
The mentoring programs at the university effectively contribute to employee motivation and job satisfaction.	3.748	0.730
Employees are motivated by the opportunity to receive mentorship from experienced colleagues or leaders at the university.	3.683	0.695
Competitive pay at the university significantly contributes to employee motivation and job satisfaction.	3.626	0.668
The university's pay structure is competitive compared to other public universities in Nairobi City County.	3.618	0.710
Aggregate	3.720	0.714

Organization Performance

The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements relating to performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The results were as presented in Table 4.3.

From the results, the respondents agreed that the university has experienced a steady increase in the number of student applications in recent years ($M=3.816$, $SD=0.873$). In addition, the respondents agreed that the university's admission rate reflects its strong reputation and appeal to prospective students ($M=3.801$, $SD=0.870$). Further, the respondents agreed that the university's graduation rate has improved in recent years due to the implementation of effective academic support services ($M=3.751$, $SD=0.636$).

From the results, the respondents agree that the university provides sufficient resources and support to ensure that students complete their studies on time ($M=3.678$, $SD=0.714$). In addition, the respondents agreed that students are generally satisfied with the quality of education they receive at the university ($M=3.638$, $SD=0.723$). Further, the respondents agreed that the university provides a high level of customer service to its students, addressing their needs and concerns effectively ($M=3.626$, $SD=0.875$).

Table 4. 3: Organization Performance

	Mean	Std. Dev.
The university has experienced a steady increase in the number of student applications in recent years.	3.816	0.873
The university's admission rate reflects its strong reputation and appeal to prospective students.	3.801	0.870
The university's graduation rate has improved in recent years due to the implementation of effective academic support services.	3.751	0.636
The university provides sufficient resources and support to ensure that students complete their studies on time.	3.678	0.714
Students are generally satisfied with the quality of education they receive at the university.	3.638	0.723
The university provides a high level of customer service to its students, addressing their needs and concerns effectively.	3.626	0.875
Aggregate	3.718	0.782

Correlation Analysis

The present study used Pearson correlation analysis to determine the strength of association between independent variables (strategic thinking and employee motivation) and the dependent variable (performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya).

Table 4. 4: Correlation Coefficients

		Organization Performance	Strategic Thinking	Employee Motivation
Organization Performance	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	278		
Strategic Thinking	Pearson Correlation	.819**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003		
	N	278	278	
Employee Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.881**	.264	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.018	
	N	278	278	278

From the results, there was a very strong relationship between strategic thinking and performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya ($r = 0.819$, p value $=0.003$). The relationship was significant since the p value 0.003 was less than 0.05 (significant level). The findings are in line with the findings of Vishalni *et al* (2021) who indicated that there is a very strong relationship between strategic thinking and organization performance.

Moreover, the results revealed that there is a very strong relationship between employee motivation and performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya ($r = 0.881$, p value $=0.000$). The relationship was significant since the p value 0.000 was less than 0.05 (significant level). The findings conform to the findings of Muogbo (2020) that there is a very strong relationship between employee motivation and organization performance.

Regression Analysis

Multivariate regression analysis was used to assess the relationship between independent variables (strategic thinking and employee motivation) and the dependent variable (performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya).

Table 4. 5: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.862	.743	.744	.10129

a. Predictors: (Constant), strategic thinking and employee motivation

The model summary was used to explain the variation in the dependent variable that could be explained by the independent variables. The r -squared for the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable was 0.743 . This implied that 74.3% of the variation in the dependent variable (performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya) could be explained by independent variables (strategic thinking and employee motivation).

Table 4. 6: Analysis of Variance

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	121.207	2	60.601	865.771	.000 ^b
1 Residual	9.525	275	.035		
Total	130.732	277			

a. Dependent Variable: performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya

b. Predictors: (Constant), strategic thinking, employee motivation,

The ANOVA was used to determine whether the model was a good fit for the data. F calculated was 865.771 while the F critical was 2.405 . The p value was 0.000 . Since the F -calculated was greater than the F -critical and the p value 0.000 was less than 0.05 , the model was considered as a good fit for the data. Therefore, the model can be used to predict the influence of strategic thinking and employee motivation on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Table 4. 7: Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Beta		
1 (Constant)	0.306		3.825	0.000
strategic thinking	0.382	0.383	3.859	0.000
employee motivation	0.370	0.369	3.895	0.001

a Dependent Variable: performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya

The regression model was as follows:

$$Y = 0.306 + 0.382X_1 + 0.370X_2 + \varepsilon$$

According to the results, strategic thinking has a significant effect on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya ($\beta_1=0.382$, p value= 0.000). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.000 was less than the significant level of 0.05. The findings are in line with the findings of Vishalni *et al* (2021) who indicated that there is a very strong relationship between strategic thinking and organization performance

The results also revealed that employee motivation has significant effect on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya, ($\beta_1=0.370$, p value= 0.001). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.001 was less than the significant level of 0.05. The findings conform to the findings of Muogbo (2020) that there is a very strong relationship between employee motivation and organization performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The study concludes that strategic thinking has a positive and significant effect on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Findings revealed that mission, vision and core values influence performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

In addition, the study concludes that employee motivation has a positive and significant effect on performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Findings revealed that training, mentoring and competitive pay influence performance of public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Recommendations

The study recommends that public universities in Kenya should institutionalize strategic foresight as part of their planning processes. By systematically analyzing trends, anticipating future challenges, and aligning long-term goals with dynamic educational demands, universities can proactively position themselves for success.

In addition, the study recommends that public universities in Kenya should implement comprehensive employee recognition and reward systems to enhance motivation. By acknowledging both academic and non-academic staff for their contributions through performance-based incentives, professional development opportunities, and non-monetary rewards such as public recognition or career advancement, universities can significantly boost morale and job satisfaction.

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