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**Influence of Strategic Planning on Academic Performance of
International Schools in Kenya**

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Abstract:

Purpose of the Study: This study examined the influence of strategic planning on the academic performance of international schools in Kenya. Specifically, it assessed whether strategic planning practices significantly enhance academic performance among international schools.

Methodology: The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design targeting leadership and senior management staff from 74 international

schools in Kenya. A sample of 161 respondents was selected using purposive and stratified random sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and bivariate linear regression at a 5% significance level.

Findings: Out of 161 questionnaires distributed, 143 were returned, representing an 88.8% response rate. The findings indicated that strategic planning was moderately practiced, with an overall mean score of 3.70. Strategic planning demonstrated a positive and statistically significant influence on academic performance ($R^2 = 0.489$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.486$, $B = 0.718$, $\beta = 0.700$, $t = 11.625$, $p < 0.001$). The regression model was statistically significant ($F(1,141) = 135.144$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that strategic planning explained 48.9% of the variation in academic performance. Schools with clearly articulated visions, evidence-based planning, stakeholder participation, and effective resource allocation consistently achieved superior academic performance outcomes.

Conclusion: The study concludes that strategic planning significantly improves academic performance in international schools in Kenya. Schools should strengthen evidence-based, participatory, and curriculum-aligned planning processes to enhance academic outcomes. Education regulators and school boards should support leadership capacity development in strategic planning to sustain academic excellence and institutional performance.

Keywords: Strategic Planning, Academic Performance, International Schools, Kenya, Strategic Planning Theory.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Academic achievement is considered one of the most important indicators of education quality and effectiveness, typically quantified by students' grades, test scores, and other assessment results (Kao & Tienda, 2022). International schools, which run internationally recognized curricula, have some of the highest academic expectations to ensure they maintain their student competitiveness to enter University and secure good careers (Tarc, 2022). Overall, good student achievement demonstrates not only good teaching, but also the environment provided for learning and it influences a school's reputation and the families who choose to attend.

International schools in Kenya function in a challenging and dynamic setting where there are different curricula, multi-cultural students, different regulatory frameworks and economic risks and uncertainties. Although considerable investment is made in education, these schools have underperformed in recent years and this has been attributed to the failure to implement the desired strategic management framework in the sector (Mwangi & Achieng, 2023). Strategic planning is one of the foundational strategic management processes that plays an important role in this challenge. This is because it is strategic planning, through which, the school leader prioritizes the learning objectives, allocates resources and connects the directions of the school with the global standards in education. In cases of poor planning, informal planning, or planning in a manner that is not linked to curriculum aims, schools could find themselves facing difficulties maintaining academic rigor and delivering higher levels of learning.

While strategic planning has been the subject of extensive research in business and public sectors, very little empirical work has been conducted to determine the specific effects of strategic planning on academic performance in companies and public institutions in Kenya's international schools sector. The literature available on planning and educational performance has concentrated on public universities, public secondary schools, or international schools outside the context of Kenya. Notably, this literature has failed to consider how planning practice impacts educational performance in internationally curricula based schools in Kenya. The purpose of this study was to fill this gap by making an attempt to establish the impact of strategic planning on academic performance of international schools in Kenya.

In the context of an education institution, strategic planning has become a significant factor for achieving performance. More and more strategic planning is being seen as a key for an education institution performance. For instance, a qualitative case study by Bryson (2018) in the USA revealed that strategic planning in public universities increased clarity of institutional objectives, better resource allocation, aligned departments to a greater extent and was well

connected to better graduation rates and research productivity. The study, however, did not go into the details of how plans at the strategic level were realized in the classroom and therefore was expected to be addressed at the school level in the present study.

In a meta-analysis of 31 studies conducted in Europe as well as Asia, Elbanna et al. (2020) found positive relations between formal strategic planning and organizational performance, with the relationship being stronger for some institutional types and regions than others. Not surprisingly, there is a gap on context when it comes to the data from sub-Saharan Africa in the meta-analysis; if this factor is not taken into account, the broad applicability of the context will be restricted to African institutions, as is the case with the institutions examined in this study. Mohamed and nor (2019) investigated public universities in Malaysia with a quantitative approach through the structural equation models, where strategic planning process directly affected teaching quality, student satisfaction and graduations. However, their study focused on public universities and was based primarily on administrative indicators and did not take into account learning institutions like international schools.

At the local level, Muuo and others (2025) reported that the greater the development of the strategic plan in public secondary schools, the higher is the level of academic achievement. Stakeholder participation in the design of a strategic plan was identified to play a key role in successful implementation of the plan, based on the descriptive surveys conducted in Machakos County. The study, however, was restricted to public secondary education and did not consider the implications for international schools. Furthermore, Waweru and Ombui (2021) analyzed strategic planning at institutions of higher study in Nairobi County and the results indicated that strategic planning positively influenced the performance of institutions in implementing curriculum, increase resource utilization, and better productivity. Their study, however, failed to take into account planning practices in basic education institutions, and this left a gap in understanding the strategy execution in international schools offering basic education.

In all of the above studies, two gaps are clearly manifest. The first is methodological limitation, which entails the lack of a direct relationship between strategic planning and academic outcomes such as student progression and retention. This can be seen in many studies based on self-reported administrative data. Second is contextual gap, where there has been little research that addresses the impact of strategic planning in Kenyan international schools in relation to the academic achievement in an integrated way. Thus, this study focused specifically on strategic planning and academic performances in international schools in Kenya to fill this gap.

The value of this study is high to educators' stakeholders. The results of its work are useful for policy makers and school regulators. This is because they formulate guidelines for effective

strategic planning to support them in setting standards for assessing the effectiveness of international schools' strategic planning for academic achievement. The findings also provide evidence for school leadership based on the impact of strategic planning on student achievement. This include the use of evidence-based decision-making, articulating a clear academic vision and mission, and engaging with stakeholders. School leaders can utilize this knowledge to implement evidence-based planning strategies to ensure the best functioning of their school and hopefully a better learning environment. The study also offers educators insights into how a school's strategic direction influences the conditions for the learning and teaching process. It also gives intuitions on how, by implementing a school's strategic direction, educators can create a classroom environment that is more engaged and supportive to learning. The study also provides essential information for parents to consider when choosing an international school. It is also vital for parents and students to be confident that strategically planned and well-managed schools can provide high quality, consistent education for their children.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

The present study was based on Strategic Planning Theory, developed by H. Igor Ansoff in 1965, in his publication on the Corporate Strategy. The theory has been built on the premise that organizations are more effective when they plan in a deliberate and long-term way. This is achieved by following a structured process, in which short- and long-term goals are defined, then opportunities and threats within the external environment and the capacities of the organizations are analyzed, and the organization chooses appropriate courses of action in order to realize the set goals (Puyt et al., 2024). It is fundamentally about the strategic plan and design of organizations, not the efficiency with which they run daily.

Strategic planning is used in the education sector to inform curriculum planning, staffing, building, technology, budgeting, and assessment. In an international environment and context that is influenced by the world and in which competition prevails, institutions need to be able to plan in a structured manner. This is to ensure that their vision, mission, and functioning remain in tandem with international standards, a necessity for maintaining academic excellence. Similarly, Fuller and Rice (2022) argue that strategic planning helps schools and nonprofit organizations to be more effective in allocating resources, deciding on objectives, and holding people accountable. More so, Silverman and Smith (2024) believe that planning improves the performance of the organization by crystallizing priorities and facilitating a more coherent approach to achieving shared goals.

Although aptly employed, Strategic Planning Theory has received criticism. Formal planning often takes place in a relatively stable and predictable context. This sometimes appear in the

field of education, thus reinforcing the theory of planning processes at the expense of emergent strategies that arise spontaneously in reaction to unexpected events (Dhlamini 2025). However, the theory still serves as a basic model to understand the role that planning plays in the enhancing of organizational performance and the attention that is drawn to the aspects of goal setting, environmental analysis and strategic alignment provide practical guidance to school leaders. In international schools Kenya, the theory will support the development of coherent strategies, which will have to ensure that the strategies of the institutions are aligned with global standards that in effect will improve academic achievement on the whole.

Based on the literature reviewed, the following null hypothesis was used to guide this study:

H0₂: Strategic planning has no significant influence on academic performance of international schools in Kenya.

3. METHODS

Research Design

The study used cross sectional research design that allowed to collect data during only one moment in time and to determine the relationship between strategic planning practices and academic performance measured in a large and wide international school sample. Appropriateness in design was noted for the analysis of association between variables and for the authentic nature of naturally existing school conditions, where it was not possible to manipulate these variables in an experimental way.

Population and Sample

The target population for the study comprised approximately 370 persons of leadership and senior management staff including principals, deputy principals, directors, academic coordinators and strategy officers in the 74 international schools in Kenya. A sample size was determined with Yamane 1967 formula set at 95% confidence level and given by: $n = N / (1 + N * e^2)$. This resulted in a sample of international schools from a population of 74 schools and a sample of 161 respondents from a population of 340 qualified senior school staff from the sample international schools. The sampling method used was multi-stage sampling. It was first done using purposive sampling to select the international schools with recognized international curricula in the major urban centers of Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru and Eldoret, before using stratified random sampling to select individual respondents based on their leadership role in each school.

Research Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected by a structured questionnaire developed to assess the strategic planning and academic performance level on a 5-point Likert scale. Construct validity of the instrument

was evaluated using Kaiser Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy test and Bartlett's test of sphericity, and internal consistency test was performed using Cronbach's alpha. The questionnaire was given to the selected respondents in the school and their rights to confidentiality and their voluntary participation was respected after the authorization and informed consent had been granted.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics included means and standard deviations were used in analyzing quantitative data that produced the extent of practice related to strategic planning of the sampled schools. The use of bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted for the test of the study hypothesis, which was set at critical value of 0.05 using the model $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + e$ with Y as academic performance and X1 as strategic planning.

4. RESULTS

Response Rate

The respondents for the study were 161 individuals from whom, schools were sampled in Kenya and consisted of International Schools. The return of the questionnaires was 143 completed and returned (88.8 per cent) and 18 were not returned. This was deemed as very satisfactory response rate and sufficient for reliable statistical analysis and generalization of results to the target population.

Reliability of the Strategic Planning Construct

Reliability testing was performed and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to evaluate the internal consistency of each construct of the questionnaire items. The Cronbach's alpha for the strategic planning construct was 0.791 with six items, and 0.878 for academic performance construct. All of the coefficients were above the usually accepted level of 0.70, indicating that the instrument had good level of reliability to measure the intended constructs. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy was 0.828 and there was a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity (chi-square = 201.615, df = 10, p = 0.000).

Descriptive Statistics on Strategic Planning

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of strategic planning for the sampled international schools.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Strategic Planning

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The school has a clear academic vision and mission.	143	3.58	1.064
Strategic plans are well aligned with curriculum goals.	143	3.55	1.149

Academic targets are clearly set and documented.	143	3.56	1.059
Staff are involved in strategic planning processes.	143	3.80	1.025
Adequate resources are allocated to the planning process.	143	3.69	.989
Strategic planning decisions are informed by evidence.	143	4.01	.622

The findings reveal that the respondents' perception of the practice of strategic planning in their schools generally agreed with a mean score between 3.55 and 4.01. The highest mean was for the statement: strategic planning decisions are based on evidence ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.622$) and the lowest mean was for the statement: strategic plans align with curriculum goals ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.149$). The overall composite mean of around 3.70 points suggest that strategic planning is moderately practiced in the sampled schools with some aspects that need to be strengthened in terms of formalization and alignment with curriculum.

Bivariate Linear Regression Analysis of Strategic Planning on Academic Performance

In determining whether the hypothesis that strategic planning has no significant effect on academic performance of international schools in Kenya was accepted or rejected, a bivariate linear regression analysis was performed. The model summary, analysis of variance and regression coefficients are given in Tables 2, 3, and 4 respectively.

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.700	0.489	0.486	0.51449

Table 3: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	35.773	1	35.773	135.144	0.000
Residual	37.323	141	0.265		
Total	73.095	142			

Table 4: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.195	0.232		5.143	0.000
Strategic Planning	0.718	0.062	0.700	11.625	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic Planning

The results showed that the strategic planning was a positively significant factor affecting academic performance. The results showed R value of 0.700 and R Square of 0.489 which indicated that the variance in academic performance explained by the strategic planning was 48.6 percent (adjusted R Square) out of 48.9 percent. The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 141) = 135.144, p < 0.001$. The coefficient for strategic planning was positive and significant ($B = 0.718, \beta = 0.700, t = 11.625, p < 0.001$), indicating a positive relationship between the two (i.e. a better strategic planning was associated with better academic performance among the international schools in Kenya). Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted and the study showed that strategic planning had significant positive effect on academic performance.

5. DISCUSSION

This study confirmed that strategic planning had positive and statistically significant effect on the academic achievement of International Schools in Kenya. Schools that were able to articulate their mission statement and vision, had evidence of decision making, had strong evidence of stakeholder involvement and had clear strategic goals were more likely to be making stronger performance outcomes. Here it is argued that planning does more than just fill administrative gaps, it is also a tool that can be used for the purpose of making effective use of school resources and academic priorities.

The results correspond to Bryson (2018), who found the strategic planning to increase clarity of goals and resource allocation in educational institutions, and to Elbanna et al. (2020), whose meta-analysis confirmed that strategic planning has a positive effect in various institutional settings and contexts on institutional performance. The finding is similar to that of Muuo et al., (2025) and Waweru and Ombui (2021), which discovered that strategic planning has a positive impact on school and institutional performance in Kenya while Mohamed and Nor (2019) found that strategic planning had positive effects for teaching quality, students' satisfaction and students' outcome in Malaysia.

Despite this, the moderate composite mean was found in the strategic planning practices. This was somewhat reflected by the comparatively low scores for aligning plans with curriculum objectives and the documentation of academic objectives. It is an indication that planning is present in most schools, but its formality and level of alignment with academic objectives is inconsistent. This mirrors the general criticism raised by Dhlamini (2025) that formal planning processes need to constantly evolve to match institutional reality in order to ensure they contribute to strategic action. The current findings, thus, reflect that planning is still valid in international schools with mixed curricula and with varying governance structures, as long as it is knowledge-oriented, collective, and tied closely to the aim of academic success.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's results found that strategic planning has a positive impact on academic performance for international schools in Kenya. Evidence-based planning, staff involvement in planning and a focus on strategic priorities are correlated with better school performance. Some aspects of planning were less strongly rated e.g., formal connection of plans to curriculum aims and plans recording academic objectives were less well rated but the impact of strategic planning on academic achievement was positive and significant overall. This implies that improvement of learning outcomes is enhanced when schools foster a planning culture and a process of planning that is structured, time-bound, and proactive, and encourages schools to prioritize learning and take action accordingly.

The study calls upon international schools to enhance the strategic planning processes in a more explicit, participative and more closely aligned to academic objectives. Academic vision, mission and targets should be clearly communicated and recorded with strategic plans being consistently integrated with priorities for the curriculum and targets for student performance in school. Planning should remain evidence-based and informed by the evidence generated in schools, benchmark performance, pupils' progression and feedback from stakeholders with participation of staff members increased to improve the ownership of the plan for the support of implementation at all levels. Strategic planning capacity is a leadership domain, which must be supported by education regulators, school owners and boards of management at policy and governance levels, as they direct policy, leadership and governance on international schools and provide policy guidance, orientation and training in planning as an integrated competency for sustaining academic excellence.

Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy

Theoretically, the study helps the Strategic Planning Theory as it offers empirical evidence of its practical application in the international school sector in Kenya where there has been limited scholarly focus as compared to public universities and public secondary schools. It suggests that the ability to link planning to curriculum goals and involve students in the planning process leads to improved academic achievement for students in international schools, providing school leaders with tangible evidence to support the improvement of their planning processes. At the policy level, the study will provide education regulators and Boards of Management with information regarding the need for strategic planning capacity-building for international school leaders as one way to sustain academic standards throughout the international school system.

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Ethics Approval

Before data collection, ethical clearance and approval to collect data was done by Kenya Methodist University and the International schools concerned. The subjects received an explanation of the research project, they were willing to participate with informed consent, and their anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed during the research process.

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Research and Publication Ethics Statement

The authors certify that this manuscript has not been submitted to another journal and has not been previously published elsewhere. More so, the findings, conclusions or recommendations presented in it are those of the authors. Results are presented in the context of prior and existing research and all sources used are appropriately cited.

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