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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**AN ASSESSMENT OF STRATEGIC FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE STUDENT CHOICE:
A CASE OF KABARAK UNIVERSITY**

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the influence of strategic factors on students' choice of Kabarak University. The study considered the following specific objectives; to determine the enrolment trends at Kabarak University, to determine the extent to which financial factors influence the students' choice of Kabarak University, to determine the extent to which marketing factors influence the students' choice of Kabarak University. It adopted Census method to select the six (6) members of management, while systematic random sampling technique was used to select two hundred and eighty (280) students to whom questionnaires were administered. Descriptive statistics and factor analysis was used to analyse the data. The questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection. The study found out those financial factors such as, flexible fees payment policy influenced students' choice to the university more than more than the marketing factors such as product development. The paper recommends that to improve enrolment in the University, there is need to recognize the fact that Kabarak university enrolment is declining and thus the University should design, implement and evaluate all inclusive change strategies. Secondly, the University should put more emphasis on the financial factor that mostly influenced students to the University. Fee payment policy should be made very flexible to attract more students from needy and poor families.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education has become increasingly competitive and universities have to compete for students in education markets. Strategic factors enable both private and public universities to meet their target student enrolment. With the liberalization of education sector in Kenya especially at the University level, many players have emerged in the market positioning themselves in the already crowded university education sector in Kenya. Most universities, especially private universities, are challenged to compete for students with the public universities which have been in the market for a longer time. A clear understanding of strategic factors puts an education institution ahead of its competitors Lewin (2006) demonstrates quite clearly that the fatal flow for many private universities has been their inability to define competitive advantage around strategic factors. Unique too, is the manner in which leading indicators of performance are founded on strategic factors and predict results on objectives linking all key performance indicators to strategy. Scott (2008) says that private universities in developed countries such as America, while battling decreased endowments and budgets cuts, aggressively recruit students through holding open courses to educate prospective students about what they offer. They also limit tuition increases and offer incentives. The study further notes that, their efforts show signs of success. Most of these private universities are able to maintain their enrolment or see modest increases. In these countries, private universities compete with less expensive community colleges and public universities but are able to survive. The common reason for low student enrolment ratio by some private universities in developing countries is that like most other private universities around the world, these private sector initiatives are usually elitist in nature. Mutula (2009) observes that the tuition is far beyond the reach of an average citizen. Secondly, some of the existing private universities seem to have begun in a hurry and can only accommodate minimal number of students. Such institutions usually find it difficult to meet the conditions of full accreditation of a

substantial number of their courses. The fact remains that proper funding and good management are basic criteria for healthy growth of public universities. It follows therefore that the levels of funding and good management is what makes the difference between one private university and the other in terms of infrastructural development and sound academic products. Such proper funding and good management revolves around proper planning, visionary and focused leadership, high ethical standard and sense of responsibility. In recent times, the private universities have faced many challenges and obstacles in order to survive and make remarkable advances in the long run. Challenges and obstacles come from either external or internal pressures.

Firstly, the unstable current economic situation that has implication toward parents' financial capability to support their children's education at university. Secondly, many established public universities recently opened and accepted more undergraduate students in their recruitment process. The situation decreases the number of undergraduate candidates who enroll at private universities. Kilemi (2006) observes that the real fact is that many students are more interested in enrolling in established public universities than in private universities as a first choice. This condition has become a tough challenge for the academic leaders of private universities to undertake strategic planning to subjugate the challenges and win the competition with established public universities. Thirdly until now there are tougher competitions among private universities themselves, to get as many possible undergraduates enrolment every year in order to survive and fulfill financial support and struggle for it alone, without getting support from the government. Only the well performing and competitive private university can win the competition. Not all private universities in Kenya report fewer applications. Though some colleges seem to have dwindling numbers, some are getting more applications than ever. Those reporting a decline are greatly concerned about averting the situation. Getting exactly the right enrolment always is a tricky proposition. This is especially crucial for small private universities with tuition driven budgets. Admissions officers point to several reasons for the drop in students' enrolment. Some students are

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looking at less expensive public universities (Jamah, 2008). If some private universities are grappling with the specter of too few applicants, it is notable that public universities are having the opposite problem: more students at a time when government financing has been reduced. Strategic management is a concept currently widely used in many state corporations, institutions of higher learning and private sector (Kangoro, 1998). Strategic management serves as a unifying theme that gives coherence and direction to the actions and decision of an individual or an organization. Johnson and Scholes (1997) define strategy as the direction and scope of an organization over the long term through its configuration of resources within a changing environment to meet the needs of market and fulfill stakeholders' expectation. Strategy guides the organizations to superior performance through establishing competitive advantage and acting as a vehicle for communicating and coordinating activities and policies within the organization (Johnson and Scholes, 2002). Strategy serves as a tool, which offers significant help for coping with environmental turbulence that often confronts organizations.

The story of private higher education in Kenya is that of entrepreneurship, ingenuity and adaptability. Oketch (2003) asserts that the industry has ups and downs and, and through it all, the key determinants of success remains the ability to attract and retain students. This is vital as the competitive arena is becoming more challenging. The public system has become a competitor because the number of public universities and colleges is increasing. Indeed amid tough competition, the pioneering spirit often makes a difference. Fortunately, this seems to be a specialty of the private education industry. According to Makinde (1994) many secondary school students today face tremendous problems when dealing with the choice of an institution of higher learning where to pursue their careers. Majority of them often indicate that they want to pursue medicine, engineering, law, pharmacy after graduation from secondary school, even when they do not have the necessary aptitude and capacity for demands of such careers and institutions offering them. Consequently, the majority of such school leavers end up pursuing the courses in institutions in which they have interest. This often results in lost opportunities to the individual and misdirected investment in the human resource in general. According to Melgosa (2000) the magnitude of this problem is increasingly becoming more crucial now than in the pre-industrial era when the career options were fewer. The author further asserts that it is increasingly becoming clear that the process of determining the institution and course to pursue is long and complex. It is notable that in the past, the career options were limited while the present age has opened up new frontiers in the world of career pursuits.

Background Information of Kabarak University

As pointed out in the Kabarak University strategic plan (2008 – 2012), Kabarak University is based upon Christian values committed to offering a range of academic programmes in humanities, social sciences, business, science and technology. Kabarak University was born of the vision and foresight of the Chancellor, His Excellency Hon. T. Arap Moi out of his love for the youth. The origins of the University are traced to Moi high school Kabarak, which he started in 1978 at his Kabarak farm. He was concerned that a small percentage of school leaver's were able to secure places at university while a majority of them, about 65%, were unable to find places. This, together with his love for the youth and Christian faith drove to expand access to higher education because, in his view, this country needed "strong, disciplined, moral and patriotic young people to propel it to prosperity and to meet future challenges with confidence". The president's idea was to set up a reputable medium sized University that would provide quality training in Christian liberal arts, science and technology university. The University is affiliated to the African Inland Church and provides quality training within Christianity so as to lay a strong Christian foundation to the graduates of Kabarak University. In 1999, the Chancellor commissioned a steering committee to prepare a proposal for establishment of Kabarak

University. The committee worked hard and presented the proposal to the Commission for Higher Education in August 2000. The consent was given when the government gazetted the university on 11th October and the Commission granted the University the Letter of Interim Authority to establish Kabarak University on 16th October 2000. On 16th May 2008 the University was granted a Charter thereby fully turning the Chancellor's dream into a reality. In June 2002, the first students were admitted into bridging course and later in August 109 pioneer students were admitted in Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Science in Computer Science degree programmes. These first students graduated in 2005. Kabarak University operates two campuses. Current academic planning is aimed at establishing new market niches. Kabarak University has entered into partnership with a number of institutions mainly in the United Kingdom. Scholarships are awarded to students every year. Vigorous marketing strategies have been put in place to advertise the University. Kabarak University is facing numerous challenges in fulfilling its objectives. These challenges include increased societal expectations, growth in demand for higher education, shifting demographics and stiff competition. Each student has a choice of enrolling in competing institutions.

According to Chapman (1987) it typically requires large scholarships to influence the enrolment decisions of high ability students. The students recruited by many colleges and universities are often offered large scholarships. These students are also more likely to be interested in institutions with higher levels of prestige and greater selectivity. For these reasons, many colleges and universities need to offer higher ability students larger scholarships if they wish to influence their enrolment decision on the basis of financial aid offers. A sample of public universities and private universities were compared in terms of their enrolments costs, faculties and quality of academic provision. General findings were that public universities appear to be more efficient in satisfying public demand in terms of quality provision. Further, it was established that in private provision improves efficiency, gives greater accountability and increased diversity of choice and access (Wilkinson, 2005). It is worth noting that private universities have been responding more quickly and efficiently to market demands and have efficient strategies to enhance their student enrolment. Managers of higher education institutions need to understand student enrolment behaviour to enhance effectiveness of enrolment planning activities and student marketing and recruitment activities. Understanding effects of such characteristics can help managers of universities tailor and target their marketing mix of programmes, prices and places to those students. Students are equally sensitive to changes in major parts of university cost tuition, accommodation costs, and financial aid.

Analysis of data collected from admitted student questionnaires on student characteristics and ratings of the characteristics of the university and its competitors allows the management to identify its competitors, assess its image, determine its market position compared to competitors. Having gathered such information, university management can adjust its strategic factors so that they are more consistent with student's desires (Paulsen, 1990). Society desires certain goods and services to be delivered in communities that profit-making concerns cannot or will not, provide. These are referred to as public or collective goods, because people who may not pay for the goods also receive benefits for them (for example, public goods such as paved roads, police protection, museum, schools and universities). A private non-profit organization tends to receive benefits from society that a private profit making organization cannot obtain. For example, they may receive a preferred tax status or tax exemptions or under certain circumstances, tax deductibility of contributions and membership fees paid. The feature that best differentiates non-profit organizations from each other, as well as profit making organizations, is their source of income. The profit making organizations depend upon revenues generated from the sale of goods and services; to customers or clients. The source of income is received from customer who purchases and utilizes the product, and who typically pays for the product upon receipt. The nonprofit organization, in contrast,

depends heavily on membership fees, assessments, donations from memberships or sponsorships. Revenue is generated from a variety of sources, not just from sale of goods and services, and clients or customers are seldom referred to as such, but are rather known as members, students, patients or even the public. With profit making organizations there is a direct simple connection between the customer or client and the organization. Revenue is generated by sales and servicing of the client or customer, which makes such organizations extremely interested in pleasing their clients or customers. A profit-making organization often only receives revenue after or on completion of providing a product and service for a customer or client. A non-profit organization often receives revenue in advance as in the case of membership subscription fees. Nonprofit organizations can be complex to manage. With proper application of strategic management principles and processes, these organizations can greatly benefit. Managers and decision makers of non-profit organization can often voluntarily elected to management and need to understand the complexity as well the importance of efficiently managing these organizations.

Brandt (1990) notes that in the 1990s, universities in Norway received more diversified demands for continuing education. Case studies of Norwegian universities shows that universities should respond to all market demands or base continuing education on research oriented teaching and learning. Further identified some strategies applied by these universities such as; news for professionals, provision of content with flexible delivery, adaptation of specialization and interdisciplinary courses for new markets. Kilemi (2006) pointed out that since private universities rely heavily on tuition and fees for income, the flexibility and stability enjoyed by these institutions becomes an issue of concern. He further cautions that, an institution's overall revenue structure reflects its diversity of funding sources. It is generally believed that an institution that derives its revenue from several independent sources enjoys greater flexibility and stability in financial capital. By contrast heavy reliance on one or a few sources such as tuition or government funding may result in greater volatility and unpredictability. However, dependence on limited sources of funds may not necessarily be risky if the sources are dependable. For instance United States International University (USIU) has a long waiting list of applicants owing to its attractive programmes, clientele niche, location and publicity and therefore dependence on tuition income may not make it financially vulnerable, the same cannot be said of the other private universities.

Geographical location or the channel of distribution involves how a firm avails its products / services to the final consumer. Services are inseparable from the service provider and this poses a challenge in marketing education services. Location of the service provides communication to the target market. Location must give the customer accurate clues about the service offering. This means that the location of an education institution should be close to target market to attract and retain potential and current clients (Mirie, 1987). Further, Oketch (2003) indicated that maintaining a steady supply of students who can afford to pay tuition is made competitive by stiff competition amongst the universities and competition from foreign universities who have launched aggressive campaign for recruiting local students. Kariuki (2007) points out that many youths are often in a great rush to get college education by any means. In their hurry, they take everything on college advertisement as the gospel truth. The choice of college is vital if one is to get things right. Institutions should offer the training that is in line with one's career ambitions, one should also consider physical facilities, location and religious pillars before making a choice. He further notes that a slightly higher fees charged may be justified by the provision of extra benefits such as access to internet. He finally concludes by saying that since college education is an opportunity that comes once in a lifetime, students must be proactive in choosing and verifying college they wish to study in. Cost communicates the quality of a product or service. In education services, high cost schools in Kenya offer high quality education. Further, cost has a major communicative role to make the total

product offered more attractive to the client (Eshiwani, 1993). Most universities in Kenya, both private and public, offer limited number of scholarships to outstanding undergraduate and postgraduate students. Though a good development, there is need to increase these scholarships to boost the number of people who deserve them. According to Oketch (2009) there have been claims of nepotism and corruption in the awarding of scholarships on the part of university management. Being a financial strategic factor, there is therefore need for scholarships to be offered on merit to act as an incentive. Universities, public and private are finally realizing that higher education must be managed as a business. Many are still struggling to identify a niche and a profit in the academic jungle. Managers of Texas Wesleyan University realized long before many others, that not – for – profit status means the institutions must make a 'profit' to survive. It is an undeniable fact that transformation of higher education is a global phenomenon-taking place in most countries in the world. Though higher education is often seen as slow to change or downright resistant, it has undergone rapid, transformation throughout the world in the last 25 years and may be in a period of unprecedented change (Nag, 2007).

Deal (2000) emphasizes that the terms staff and educational development are often used interchangeably in contemporary higher education, yet the distinct nomenclature may be significant. The Pre – 1992 universities have traditionally placed more emphasis on staff development, focusing on training programmes for academic and support staff, whereas in the former polytechnic, more strategic development has usually been pioneered by those with the broader brief of educational development. Managing change is a high priority for universities coping simultaneously with increased student numbers and reductions in resources, while facing greater demands of accountability and quality assurance. Further, notes that staff development units and their officers walk a delicate tightrope. They are often required to mirror and reflect institutional objectives and values. David .h. etal(2001) notes that strategic alliance is a partnership of two or more corporations, business units or universities formed to achieve strategically significant objectives that are mutually beneficial. Alliances between companies, businesses or universities have been a fact of life in modern business. Each of the top 500 global business firms now average 60 major alliances. Some alliances are very short term, only lasting long enough for one partner to establish a beachhead in a new market. Companies or business units may form strategic alliances for a number of reasons, manufacturing capabilities and access to specific markets, to reduce financial or political risk, and to achieve competitive advantage. A study by Crooper found that firms involved in strategic alliances had 11 percent higher revenue and 20 percent higher growth rate than did companies not involved in alliances.

It is likely that forming and managing strategic alliances and university linkages is a capability that is learned over time. Research reveals the more experience a firm or university has with strategic alliance; the more likely its alliances will be successful. The universalization of education and its worldwide acceptance as a continuous or lifelong undertaking, coupled with concerns about educational access and equity. (Sangai, 2004) as well as the prevailing level of poverty, necessitates the use of various educational delivery approaches to enable all citizens to benefit from this public good. The major and competing delivery approaches are the conventional distance learning and open learning. The conventional system caters for the needs of full time learners from a specific age group enrolled in recognized institution of learning at various levels of the education system, primary, secondary and tertiary. The requirement of such a system, usually determined by the relevant school/university boards, largely excludes many people outside the age groups, those who are unable to fulfill essential eligibility requirements, and those who need education and training to gain competence in jobs and upgrading of their qualifications and training (Shangai:2004). In the conventional approach the learner has to be on-campus, to register as a fulltime student able to attend the face to

face lectures and seminars communication between the teacher and student is direct; this facilitates immediate exchange of messages (doubts and difficulties) and resolution of any learning problem. Distance education is an approach that takes education to many learners who are separated, mostly by time and space, from those who are teaching and training; it is a mode that has a high potential for transcending barriers that are caused by distance, time and age; thus facilitating lifelong learning. A good distance education program makes full use of information and communication technology through the application of a wide range of media; print and audio visual, CD-ROM, computers and internet. Through distance education the learner enjoys a high degree of autonomy in deciding what, when and how to learn. Open learning is a much wider concept than distance education but it is much more difficult to implement. It encompasses all forms of education and training, and can take place within the single mode, dual mode, consortium, or the mixed mode. As such it can be conducted parallel and or/integrated to the formal/conventional education and training (Komba *et al.*, 2006). The system can be defined as one in which the restrictions placed on students are under constant review and removed whenever possible. Openness is considered in relation to various barriers to education in the process of intake, participation, progression, completion as well as achievement. Such barriers include the students' economic circumstances (e.g. ability to pay). Universities offering distance education learning are able to attract more students to enroll in their campuses.

Zytowski (1968) asserts that the circumstances of birth, which establishes a family, race, nationality and social class together with educational and cultural opportunities, play a significant role in shaping an individual's choice of a university. Each particular student will want to choose a learning institution that will reflect the social status of their family although parents may influence their choice. Decisions made concerning choice of a university should ensure wholesome reasons are considered as opposed to depending on what the environment offers or dictates. Peer pressure is one of the background factors, which can influence the choice of a university to enroll. Every generation of students in a given school will view certain learning institutions as ideal and as a result many of them including those without aptitude for the preferred institution will aspire for it. The availability of opportunities can influence aspiration and choice. Students can be guided to choose universities which can allow them to take advantage of training opportunities in and outside the country. Using Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the needs that are routinely satisfied do not become unconscious motivators but the higher the order of needs will disappear entirely if they are only lately satisfied as the lower order needs become predominant (Gothard, 1987). The approach suggests that early environment and the influence it has on needs development will determine motivation towards a particular university. Makinde (1984) contends that the fulfillment of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (psychological, aesthetic and social) enter into occupational decision making.

The choice of an institution of higher learning is an expressive act, which reflects the person's motivation knowledge, personality and ability. For most people, university choice is not a decision, made quickly in early adulthood. The life cycle imposes stages in life; consequently people develop and change in respect to their vocations. Public universities in Kenya have undergone major changes in the last ten years. Jamah (2008) asserts that one phenomenal change in this regard is the introduction of self sponsored degree courses, which are offered in the evening hours. Indeed, these courses have attracted a huge portion of students who have been craving to have an opportunity to further their studies as they work. It is worth noting that the introduction of these courses has radically transformed the face of academic practice in public universities in Kenya. Firstly, the universities have managed to raise a lot of money through this venture; consequently universities such as Kenyatta University have initiated expansion programmes that have seen the institution introduce courses such as medicine and law. University of Nairobi

has also embarked on massive refurbishment programme that has seen its buildings and road ways redone in modern fashion. Investment in higher education cannot be overestimated. Though such investment seems expensive in a short-run, the cost of under investment is much larger as a country's competitive advantage now rests mainly on knowledge of its citizens as opposed to natural resources. This is because knowledge is increasingly attaining the status of an independent resource, not as part of the traditional resources (land, labour and capital) as advocated by factor endowment theories in economics. In addition, due to rapidly changing worlds technological reality, even the world bank which was initially skeptical on the returns on tertiary education, as alluded to earlier, has now changed its position. In just released 2007 world development report it is concluded that returns on tertiary education has risen significantly. Thus, the effective implementation of critical knowledge management processes may indeed create some frog leaping of some economies as was predicted by (Drucker, 1999:158)

A Common phenomenon for Kenyan public universities is to launch a branch out of the main campus. These campuses often involve innovative partnerships, both with other post secondary institutions. Many universities of all sizes must have come to the conclusion that a good way to find students is to look beyond their boundaries both to small or remote communities and to fast growing towns. The current wave of off – site and out of town university expansion is on the increase. These campuses serve many students many of whom are already working, with evening and weekend classes leading to a degree awards. Whatever the motive, there is no compelling evidence to suggest that these expansion strategies benefit young people living in rural areas or small towns (Jamah, 2007). In fast changing environments, efficient transformation can only be successful if there is a total commitment by all strategic decision makers, including stakeholders, role players, interest groups, and interested members who share in the vision of the University to ensure development of the strategic management practices for future long term sustainability. Universities are adapting to changes in the environment, need to tighten up efficiency in decision-making and managing such change. Often strategic decision-makers and managers of these institutions are expected to make strategic decisions on behalf of their institutions of higher learning. Due to other primary work or daily business commitments, these decision makers often need to be alert to new innovations in the market. Many opportunities thus fall by wayside, especially when environments are fast changing and rely on efficient management of such institution. This eventually determines the long term sustainability of such institution. The essence of strategic approach for universities is imperative especially in the present environment that is continually introducing change and transformation. Many existing public and private universities have been forced to revamp their enrolment strategies and revisit their existing situations. Some are developing new strategies to reign themselves with change.

Statement of the Problem

Against the background of a growing number of qualified students seeking higher education, there is a stiff competition amongst the universities in attracting students. Hence, the universities have to develop strategic factors that are student oriented to maintain or increase their enrolment. While a number of universities have a long waiting list of students, Kabarak University enrolment growth is erratic, and more importantly, there has been a marked reduction in student enrolment. It is therefore not clear whether or not these strategic factor initiatives at Kabarak University influence students' choice of the University. This study sought to find out the influence of Kabarak University's strategic factors on students' decision to enroll at Kabarak University.

Purpose and objectives of the study

This study assessed the influence of strategic factors on students' choice of Kabarak University. Knowledge of factors influencing

students' choice of a university can provide a basis to Kabarak University management to implement strategic factors that are result oriented and can influence students choice. Also the study was aimed at giving the Kabarak University management the insight about whether strategic factors they have put in place have influenced student choice of Kabarak University. Finally, Kabarak University was studied because other universities have reported high enrolments while a decline is being experienced in the University. The objectives of the study were: determining the enrolment trends of students at Kabarak University, determining the most important financial factor influencing students' choice of Kabarak University and determine the most important marketing factor influencing students' choice of Kabarak University.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a case study design. The purpose of this case study was to determine the relationship between university's strategic factors and student's choice of Kabarak University. A detailed examination of Kabarak University as a single subject was studied to arrive at the relationships between variables. Being an exhaustive study, this method enabled the researcher to understand fully the influence of strategic factors on choice of Kabarak University. According to the information obtained from Kabarak University admission office as at 30th May 2009 there were a total of 1020 students and 6 members of management staff namely; Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Provost, University Librarian, Dean of Students Registrar (Admin and HR); this formed the target population. The University management was studied because their main task is to formulate and implement strategies in the university. Census method was used to select six (6) members of management to whom questionnaires were administered. Systematic random sampling technique was used to select two hundred and eighty (280) students required for the study using the formula below. In total, therefore, the sample size for this study was 286 which was a good representation and aimed at reducing bias. The study used questionnaires as the main instrument in data collection in. The questionnaires were administered to the students and members of management. Descriptive statistics was employed to generate frequencies, percentages and bar graphs. Factor analysis was used in the study to assess the influence of strategic factors on student's choice of Kabarak University.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Assessment of the Students Enrolment Trend

The study found out that the faculty of commerce was leading in enrolment with 147 students, followed with 127 students from Bachelor of Business Management and Information Technology with 127 students, computer science had 58 students, school based program had 37 students, education had 11 students and theology did not have any student. Concerning the projected enrolment at the university, the study found out that the faculty of commerce was projected to lead in enrolment with anticipated enrolment of 1435 students, followed with 595 students from faculty of computer science, Bachelor of Management and Information Technology followed with 571 students, school based program had 234 students, economics had 114, education had 82 and theology was projected to take 66. The above finding showed that the students enrolled in the year 2007 at Kabarak University preferred business based subjects (Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Business Management in IT) to all other disciplines offered at the University and that the University management also had a similar projected enrolment in the year although the projected enrolment was far above the actual enrolment. The study found out that the Faculty of Commerce was still leading in enrolment with 90 students, followed with 74 students from faculty of BBMIT, 27 students from the faculty of computer science, pre university enrolment had 42 students, school based program had 19 students, economics had 15, education had 3 and theology had 6. Compared to

the year 2007 actual enrolment, there was a noticed drop in the enrolment in the preferred faculties like Bachelor of commerce and BBMIT. Generally, the above enrolment figures were much below the projected enrolment under each faculty. The actual student enrolment for the year 2009 were based on the figure 5 above where the study found out that the faculty of commerce was leading in enrolment with 66 students, followed with 36 students from Bachelor of Business Management and Information Technology, computer science had 30 students, pre-university had 42 students, school based program had 23 students, theology had 6 student. This finding shows that the university was experiencing decline in the enrolment in all the faculties apart from the faculty of theology. The above enrolment figures were still far below the university's enrolment projections. This finding shows that the year 2009 enrolment was the poorest compared to the preceding years and that the university was continuously on the declining trends as far as the actual students enrolment was concerned, a fact that requires the university to come up with strategies to turn around this scenario.

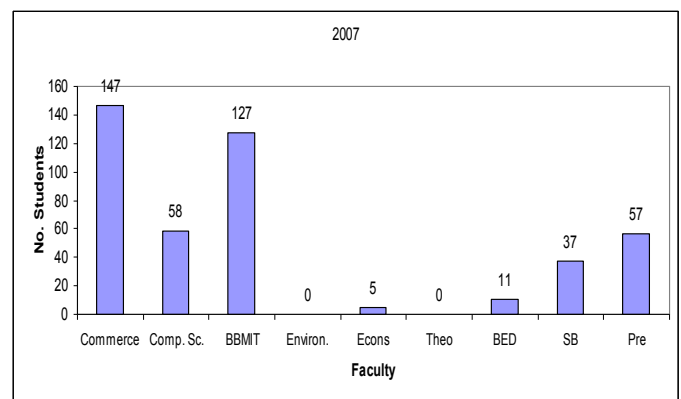


Figure 1: Actual Students Enrolment Sept. 2007

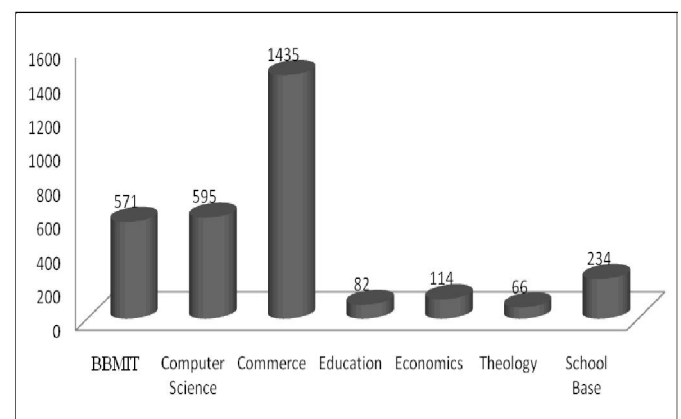


Figure 2: Projected Enrolment Sept. 2008

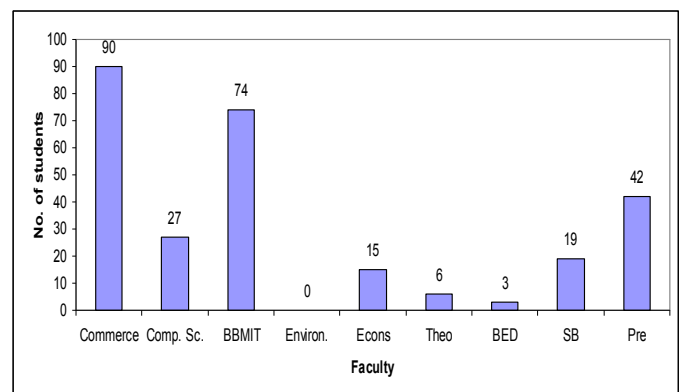


Figure 3: Actual Students Enrolment Sept. 2008

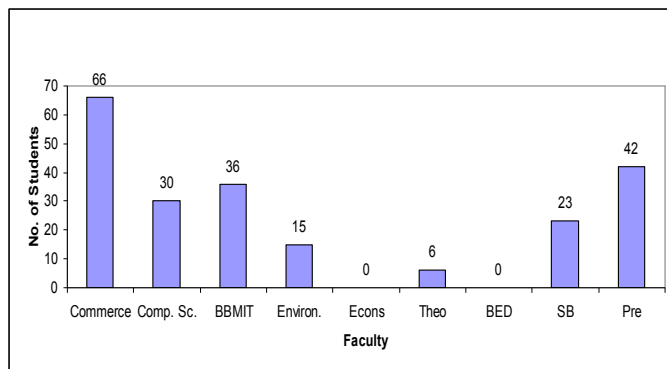


Figure 4: Actual Students Enrolment Sept. 2009

The general enrolment trend in Kabarak University continued to pose a challenge to the University's strategists since the gap between the projected enrolment figures and the actual enrolment figures continued to widen. This finding poses a lot of strategic management challenges. This scenario of declining enrolments in courses such as Theology and Education may be due to low demand of its graduates in the market. In particular education graduates are currently experiencing unemployment due to government freeze of recruitment of teachers thus students enroll in other courses. Therefore, the University needs to introduce more degree programmes. The University has not succeeded in introducing courses such as law, medicine, engineering programmes and M.sc which had been projected to have commenced by the year 2007 as indicated in the strategic student growth plan. These courses could have further influenced students' choice since the courses are on high demand. Another factor that might be contributing to declining numbers at the University is the cost of financing university education. Currently students are looking for less expensive public universities offering the parallel degree courses at convenient times such as evening classes. The findings show that there is an overwhelming competition in higher education brought about by the public universities offering regular and self sponsored degree courses at lower cost as compared to private universities.

The Financial the actual Factors Influencing Students Choice of Kabarak University

The study in the second objective sought to determine the extent to which the financial factors influence students' choice of Kabarak University. The factors identified for this study were; fees payment policies used by the University and scholarship awards. The study used factor analysis to analyze the respondents' views on the influence of these financial factors on students' choice of Kabarak University.

Table 1: The Financial Factors Influencing Students Choice of Kabarak University

Factors	TA	A	PA	D	TD	Total
Flexible Fess Payment Policy	46.2	28.0	12.9	8.0	4.9	100.0
Scholarship awards on merit	4.9	9.1	4.9	52.1	29.0	100.0

Source: Field Data (2009)

Table 3 above shows the responses on the financial factors that influenced the students' choice of Kabarak University. TA – Totally Agree, A- Agree, PA – Partially Agree, D – Disagree, TD – Totally Disagree. The study established that the majority of the respondents 74.2% agreed that the fees payment policy at the university was flexible while 81.1% of the respondents disagreed that the university awarded the students scholarships on merit thus was not an influential factor.

Table 2: Factor Analysis of the Financial Related Factors

Factor	1	2	3
Financial - Fees policy is flexible	0.040	0.024	0.999
Financial - Scholarship awarded on merit	0.852	-0.523	-0.006

Source: Field data (2009)

The study used the 3rd level of factor loading in the principle components in factors analysis. The factor whose component was 50% and above was taken to be the favourable factor in the students' choice of Kabarak University. The study therefore established that the students favoured flexible fees policy whose principle component at the third factor loading was 0.999 in their choice of Kabarak University. The findings above indicate clearly that attracting and maintaining a steady supply of students who can afford to pay unsubsidized fees such as in public universities requires an aggressive campaign and provision of incentives such as high flexibility in school fees payment. Use of other incentives such as work study for students from poor families to help them raise fees may influence their choice of the University. Findings also points out that the institution need to diversify to other revenue generating ventures so as to enjoy flexibility and stability in financial capital and thus avoiding over reliance in tuition paid by students especially with its current condition of low and erratic enrolment. From the findings, scholarship awards did not influence most of the students' choice. This scenario may have been caused by the amount of the award offered to deserving undergraduate and post graduate students. It typically requires larger scholarships to influence the enrolment decisions of high ability students. These students are also likely to be interested in institutions with higher levels of prestige. There is need to increase these scholarships to boost the number of students who deserve them and also offer it on merit.

The Marketing Factors Influencing Students Choice of Kabarak University

The study in the third objective sought to determine the extent to which the marketing factors influence students' choice of Kabarak University. The following marketing factors were identified; promotional efforts, linkages and collaboration and religion. The study used factor analysis to analyze the respondents' views on the influence of these marketing factors.

Table 3: Marketing Factors Influencing Students Choice of Kabarak University

Factors	TA	A	PA	D	TD	Total
Religion	46.2	28.0	12.9	8.0	4.9	100.0
Collaboration and linkages	42.0	25.5	10.8	13.3	8.4	100.0
Promotional efforts	43.7	26.9	12.9	8.8	7.7	100.0
Average	44.0	26.8	12.2	10.0	7.0	100.0

Source: Field Data (2009)

The study established that the majority of the respondents 74.2% agreed that the religion was an important factor in their choice of the university, the majority of the respondents 67.5% agreed that collaboration and linkages with other university abroad influenced their choice of the University, the majority of the respondents 70.6% agreed that promotional efforts was an important factor in their choice of the University. This findings show that students' choice of Kabarak University is greatly influenced by the Christian values at the University. This is a virtual that the institution is proud to be associated with. Location of the main campus did not greatly influence students' choice. This can be attributed to accessibility to target market. Students wishing to enroll for evening programmes may not access the campus easily thus opting to enroll in colleges situated in towns. Promotional efforts did not influence student's choice, this indicate that the management need to launch an aggressive marketing campaign to advertise the University. Collaborations and linkages from the findings did not influence students' decisions. The collaborations and linkages may be enhanced further by involving local private and public universities which are already established and do more exchange programmes and benchmarking.

Table 4: Factor Analysis of the Marketing Related Factors

Factor	1	2
Campus location	0.976	-0.005
Collaboration and linkages	0.887	-0.076
Christianity	0.906	0.873

Source: Field Data (2009)

The 2nd level of factor loading in the principle components in factors analysis was used to analyze the most important marketing factor that influenced the students' choice of Kabarak University. The study established that the respondents identified Christianity as the most influential factor whose principle component at the second factor loading was 0.873 in their choice of Kabarak University.

Summary

The main objective of this study was to assess the influence of strategic factors in influencing students' choice of Kabarak University. The study came up with a number of important findings that should be taken up by Kabarak University management in order to reinvent strategies that can attract students in making the institution their choice. First, the study established that the students' enrolment at Kabarak University is decreasing and that currently, the University is under enrolled. This was based on their enrolment projections. Secondly, the main financial factor that influenced student choice was the flexible fees payment policy. Third, the study established that Christianity was the main marketing factor that students considered in the choice of Kabarak University.

Conclusion

Strategic Management is a very important tool that can help design strategic factors that can influence students' choice of Kabarak University. The study at its inception opted to assess the influence of strategic factors on students' choice of Kabarak University. The study established that flexible fees payment policy, leadership approaches, Christianity and product development were the main factors that influenced the students' choice of the university.

Recommendations

From the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are very crucial for enhancing the student choice of Kabarak University. The findings could improve enrolment in the University. First, is a need to recognize the fact that its enrolment is declining and thus Kabarak University should design, implement and evaluate all inclusive change strategies. Secondly, the University should put more emphasis on factors that mostly influence students to Kabarak University. First, fee payment policy should be made very flexible to attract more students from poor families. Second, more new courses such as medicine and law need to be introduced to attract more students. Kabarak University may also explore and implement more strategic factors that normally attract students in other universities. Such factors should include but not limited to; improvement in scholarly reputation of the University, financial support of the needy bright students, promotional efforts through the internet, media and participation in community work all over the country, collaborations and linkages with other universities to share information, courses and other resources which may currently not be available at the University..

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