

العنوان:	Strategic Management in Saudi Arabian Private Pre-University Education : A Case Study
المصدر:	دراسات - العلوم التربوية
الناشر:	الجامعة الأردنية - عمادة البحث العلمي
المؤلف الرئيسي:	العنزي، عمير يتيم
المجلد/العدد:	مج 46, ع 2
محكمة:	نعم
التاريخ الميلادي:	2019
الصفحات:	749 - 760
رقم MD:	948778
نوع المحتوى:	بحوث ومقالات
اللغة:	Arabic
قواعد المعلومات:	EduSearch
مواضيع:	الإدارة الإستراتيجية، الإدارة التعليمية، الإدارة المدرسية، التعليم الخاص ما قبل التعليم الجامعي، المملكة العربية السعودية
رابط:	https://search.mandumah.com/Record/948778

Strategic Management in Saudi Arabian Private Pre-University Education: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study discussed issues of strategic management in the private pre-university context in Saudi Arabia. Private pre-universities show considerable interest in investment and entrepreneurship, but they lack such interest in academic research. This study aimed to bridge this gap. The first part of the study presented the theoretical issues in relation to strategic management with a focus on the educational sector. The second part presents an empirical case study of one private school in Riyadh. The study employed interviews, documentary analysis and researcher diaries. The findings showed a number of gaps in relation to strategic planning and management. Among these is the lack of a shared mission, visions and values. There is also a gap in understanding the key strategic issues, for example, the role of the teacher in strategic issues.

Keywords: Strategy, Strategic Management, Mission, Vision, Planning, SWOT, Private Education, Saudi Arabia.

Introduction

Strategy and strategic planning are considered critical factors towards development, improvement and success (Morden, 2012). Several issues can be learned from management in business and can be reflected on and applied to education, especially when the institution enjoys self-management. The similarity between education and business is more obvious in the private sector of education in Saudi Arabia, where institutions are subject to market-forces and must compete for more students in order to survive or to expand their profit margins.

The Saudi Arabian private pre-university education market environment is marked as highly competitive; there are a large number of providers (private schools) and this suggests a relatively smaller number of students per school. Such a competitive environment suggests that educational institutions need effective strategies in order to compete and win a larger market-share, but in practice, most private educational institutions in Saudi Arabia lack the strategic management approaches in planning for the long-term, and most of their practices and plans are more operational, rather than strategic. Current interest is identified in the Saudi educational policy to empower self-managed and independent pre-university education (Al-Balawi & Al-Zaboun, 2017).

This paper aims to identify the importance of strategy and its practices in the Saudi private pre-university educational sector. It presents a critical case study of strategy in practice at Al-Majles Private School (pseudonym). The paper is structured in two sections. The first presents a review of the literature related to strategy and strategic planning with a focus on the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) strategy analytical tool. The second section reflects on this tool and presents a case study of Al-Majles Private School in Riyadh. The case study starts by introducing the School and the marketplace and sets it within a national and regional context. Next, the strategic practices, aims, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are analysed. The case study also offers key issues and some practical implications.

Strategy and Strategic Planning

In defining strategy, Davies and Davies (2006, 156) suggest that it is the sense of direction; it translates the vision and purpose into action which is to be taken into the future. In other words, it is a delivery mechanism that draws a plan for the

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organization so that it can accomplish its aims and objectives in the most effective and efficient manner. The relationship between strategy and strategic planning is always present. Knight (1997), and Thomson and Martin (2010) suggest that strategy without planning is problematic and meaningless, since strategy refers to the future, and planning refers to the present, and the completion of strategy requires a willingness to suspend belief in present practice. Although, Davies and Davies (2006, 129) claim that there is a difference between strategy and strategic planning, the difference, if it even exists, is minimal. Their claim is that strategic planning is only one of a number of approaches to strategy, which are strategic planning; emergent strategy; entrepreneurial strategy, and strategic intent. However, strategic planning is a more appropriate phrase since it contains the other mentioned elements (Knight, 1997). Kotler et al. (2002, 123) say that strategic planning is the process of developing and maintaining a *strategic fit* between the organisation's goals and capabilities and its changing marketing opportunities. It relies on developing a clear institutional mission, supporting goals and objectives, sound plans, and appropriate implementation. A strategic plan sets objectives, sets steps to achieve the objectives, implements the steps, examines the process, sets likely adjustments, and also has a contingency plan (Knight, 1997). Therefore, in this paper, the term 'strategic planning' is used to refer to the whole strategic process of an institution.

The significance of strategic planning lies in the benefits it provides the organization with (Albon, Iqbal, & Pearson, 2016). Firstly, strategic planning shapes the direction an institution takes, normally setting out the major moves an institution makes in order to achieve them (Pardey 1991). Secondly, it promotes staff commitment and productivity by providing them with a shared vision, mission, and the objectives to be achieved (Lumby, 1998, 93). Thirdly, strategic planning enables the institution to be future-oriented and proactive and this provides an institution with greater market opportunities (Middlewood 1998, 6). Fourthly, strategic planning is planning for an uncertain and changing environment; it is through creating a kind of pattern on the mass of different factors that are likely to affect an organisation in the longer term and that more rational predictions can be arrived at (Morden, 2012). Therefore, strategic planning conveys a sense of security to the institution. Finally, as Pascale (1990, quoted in Middlewood, 1998) suggests, having a strategy is not a guarantee of success but a lasting success is impossible without one.

Cheng (2002, 64) argues that strategic management and planning be emphasised in a rapidly changing educational environment in the new millennium, and leadership for such strategic management in educational institutions inevitably becomes a necessity. Cheng (*ibid*) defines strategic leadership as leadership for initiating, developing and maintaining strategic management processes. It is vital that leaders can differentiate between strategic management and day-to-day operational management. Adair (2010) says that a strategic leader is one who uses strategic thinking in to enable them to plan for the longer term, be reflective, conceptual, and creative. It also helps the leader to use the whole capabilities of the organisation effectively, identify opportunities, examine external environment, and have a *helicopter perspective* of the whole organization both at present and in the future. On the other hand, leaders who are swamped with operational thinking and management of routine day-to-day issues are less effective since they are short-sighted, reactive, and able to resolve only existing problems.

The impact of marketing on strategic planning is quite considerable. Foskett (1998, 48) points out that the process of strategic planning cannot be achieved without understanding the marketplace. Similarly, Al-Fattal (2011) states that in a market-oriented institution, for example, private pre-university education in Saudi Arabia, strategic management must start from the market. Kotler and Fox (1995, 94) suggest the term *strategic marketing planning* which implies planning the overall direction of the institution to respond to its markets and opportunities. Thus, marketing is central to strategic planning and may be regarded as an holistic approach to the management of an institution which encompasses its mission, strategies and operations, and in which the whole purpose of the institution is focused on the needs and wants of its customers (Foskett, 2002, 245).

Steps in Strategic Planning

A frequently cited model that aims at helping an organisation plan strategically has been offered by Kotler and Fox (1995, 95). The model suggests that the process of strategic planning goes through the following stages: environment

analysis, resources analysis, formulation of vision, mission and objectives, and formulation and implementation of strategy. The following part of this study focuses on this model and its stages together with the related literature.

Environmental Analysis

The first step an institution takes in strategic planning is to scan and analyse the present and future environment. Evans (1995) argues that educational institutions operate within a complex and rapidly changing environment. Therefore, designing strategy without considering the environmental factors is problematic and meaningless. The environmental analysis is usually conducted through environmental auditing to identify the major trends in the environment and to check the implications of these trends for the institution (Kotler and Fox, 1995, 97). Eventually, analysing the environment helps an institution identify expected opportunities and threats.

Environment is normally divided into three areas. Firstly, it is the internal environment, which is the internal world of an institution, as represented by its culture, original mission, existing strategy, early history, size, and past success (Kotler et al, 2002, 127). Secondly, the external micro-environment consists of people and organizations that have the potential to have an immediate impact on the institution (Evans, 1995). Micro-environment consists of competitors, customers, suppliers, and the public. Finally, macro-environment is the large societal factor (economic, political, and demographic factors).

Resources Analysis

The second step is to review and assess the resources available to the institution. Resource analysis provides not only an insight into the institution's resources but it also provides the institution with a better understanding of its own capabilities (Gilligan & Wilson, 2012). It identifies the major and strong resources that the institution has, which represent the institution's strengths. It also identifies the resources it lacks, which represent the weaknesses. The more an institution knows about its strengths and capabilities the better it can invest in them. Kotler and Fox (1995, 143) categorise resources into two types; the intangible resources, such as good reputation, long history, and traditions, and the tangible resources, such as financial resources, facilities, and staff.

Vision, Mission, and Objectives Formulation

The third step in the process of strategic planning is to identify the overall aims and goals for the institution. This is explained through its vision, mission, and objectives.

Vision

Vision is a prosperous desirable image of what might be; an ideal that is unique to the person or the institution and recognises dissatisfaction with the present. It is a catalyst for action, and reflects core values (Foreman, 1998, 22). It is the institution's philosophy that connects all of its staff, managers, and actions to a shared cause (Karami & Analoui, 2003).

In building a shared vision, Adair (2010) argues that leadership has the responsibility of creating agreements about the future of the institution, which in turn will strengthen the members of staff commitment to the whole institution. Lumby (2002, p.89) suggests that a shared vision grows out of informal activities and communication between leadership and staff, rather than meetings, consultation, and documents. Those activities were underpinned by daily informal discussion and conversations of what the staff were doing and why. In addition, a shared vision can be achieved through gaining the interest and aspiration of others by collective practices (Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2013). Therefore, the role of leadership is stressed to involve members of the institution in building a vision, so it will not be just a thought in the mind of the principle, but rather in the minds of all.

Mission

The mission is best described as the purpose and values of an institution. It defines the business an institution is in, and

it sets out what the functions of an institution to society are, as well as what it offers, whom it serves, and in what method. Thus, the mission clarifies the general direction of the institution by identifying its core values. An institution, for example, can decide whether it wants to be market oriented (by satisfying clients' needs as well as the institution's values) or product oriented (by focusing on the academic part of the courses it offers). In other words, the combination of the values of the institution and the needs of the market determine the organizational mission (Morden, 2010).

Most theorists believe that the mission should be a written document, often known as the *mission statement* (Gilligan & Wilson, 2012). Stott and Parr (1991) define the mission statement as a simple, clear, and comprehensible expression to both the outside world and those within the institution, of what the institution is about. Leadership in constructing a mission statement should consider the fact that it should set the image and direction of the institution. It normally provides the members of the institution with the basis for a decision-making process. In addition, the mission statement ideally provides everyone in the institution with a shared sense of purpose, motivation, significance, and achievement (Kotler and Fox, 1995, 154). It is advised not to be too general or too broad (Adair, 2010). Sagon and Barnett (1994, quoted in Foreman, 1998, 27) provide an example of a mission statement from a school in San Diego, which could be described as too general: *'Our mission is to prepare all students to become lifelong learners who are self-supporting, responsible, participating members of the American society'*. Such a broad statement is advised to be avoided, because a very important aim of the mission statement is to guide the decision making, not to provide a free environment for decisions to be made (Pardey, 1991). Finally, Peeke (1994, quoted in Foreman, 1998) argues that the process of building a mission statement is a powerful method of promoting organisational change.

Objectives

An institution's goals and aims derived from the vision and mission for the coming years are called objectives. They are advised to be specific, manageable, achievable, and relevant targets. For example, an institution's objective is to increase profits by ten per cent every year or to increase market share by five per cent every year. Institutions usually measure and evaluate their performance through their objectives, and how successful the institution is in achieving them. Objectives should be derived from the institution's vision and mission statement, and are described as steps that are working towards achieving the organisation's vision and mission (Karami & Analoui, 2003). Institutions usually have a set of objectives to be achieved, and the institution's leadership should decide what objectives are to be given priority (Adair, 2010). When deciding on objectives, an institution could have some contradicting or even conflicting objectives, for example, in a private educational institution the common inner tension in setting and prioritising objectives lies in the balance between commercial and academic prospective (White et al, 1991, 199). Therefore, an institution needs to order its objectives in a hierarchy of priorities.

It is important to mention that a vision, mission statement, and objectives are not fixed; they are flexible and can be reviewed and adjusted in time. This is justified by the fact that the environment an institution exists in is constantly changing, such as the case in the Saudi private educational context. It is also likely for an institution to review and amend its aims if a change in its resources takes place. Another reason that is likely to cause changes in the aims of the institution is a change in leadership or even in the style of leadership.

Formulating and Implementing the Plans

The fourth step in the strategic process is to formulate and implement the plan. Writing a mission statement and objectives does not make them real; actions and practices should be set out to achieve those aims (Stringham, 2012). Setting a vision, mission, and objectives is a good method for strategic planning, but success depends on how well they are translated into action. Owen (1993, quoted in Lumby, 1998, 102) asserts that it is better to have a first-class implementation strategy for a second-class strategy than vice versa. That justifies the significance of a strategic plan to consider how those objectives are going to be implemented. A strategic plan is also advised to be feasible and formulated with an awareness of the institution's capabilities. A strategic plan is formulated by bringing together the environmental

analysis, resource analysis, and the institution's aims. In other words, it is about how to achieve the institution's aims in a specific environment and with specific resources (Gilligan & Wilson, 2012). When formulating the plans, a priority of objectives should be taken into consideration. Once the strategic plan is ready, the challenging task at this level is to implement it.

Implementing new strategies usually requires changes not only in the institution's structure but also in its culture. Thus, a strategic plan should consider another plan for the expected change. It requires changing the people within the institution and the way they approach and understand the new aims and goals. It is likely that a new strategy will face some resistance. In education, resistance usually occurs when implementing a new shifting strategy that changes the institution from being product-oriented to being market-oriented (Kotler and Fox, 1995, 101).

There are several analytical methods and tools an institution can use in formulating a strategic plan. One of these analytical tools is the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis.

SWOT Analysis

A widely-applied framework of analysis is SWOT which is particularly useful in considering the position of an institution in a competitive market situation. The SWOT analysis is a model for designing strategic plans. (See Figure 1 below).



Figure 1. The SWOT analysis tool

Strengths and weaknesses arise from within an institution; they are the internal factors, or they are the resources an institution has. For example, if an institution has well qualified staff, this will count as strength. It is important for an institution to know its strengths and weaknesses. When the institution knows its weaknesses it is advised to work on converting them into strengths. In addition, an institution should strive to build on its strengths.

Opportunities and threats arise from the outside world of the institution, which is the external environment. A strategy should find out the probable opportunities and seize them, and it should work on converting threats into opportunities. For instance, an institution facing the threat of a decline in the number of students decides to put more effort into improving its quality or achieving excellence in a niche market.

The Case Study

As stated earlier, the study aims at improving practical strategic planning in private schools in the particular context of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, through exploring the current strategic planning at Al-Majles Private School (AMPS). The case study seeks to examine strategies and strategic planning practices in AMPS.

Background

AMPS is a relatively large private school, with approximately 2,500 students. The school is located in a central area of Al-Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. It was established in 2004 by Mr. Omar, a business investor who is a former teacher. In the beginning the premises of the school consisted of ten classrooms, a staff room, a reception office, and an administration office. The staff at the beginning consisted of Mr. Omar the Principal, two receptionists, seven full-time teachers and four part-time teachers. However, in the following years the school expanded noticeably; in 2007 and 2009 the school expanded its premises within the same area to 25 classrooms and a library, but the number of staff offices remained the same. The staff now comprises of Mr. Omar as Principal, Mahmood and Jamal (both sons of the Principal) as Principal Assistants, four receptionists, a librarian, 20 full-time teachers and 11 part-time teachers. The life cycle of the school, which was estimated by the sales and profits over the years, was described as slightly declining. The cycle was illustrated in a series of changes starting from growth in the early 2000s, and reaching maturity by the end of 2012, and then declining after 2014, (See Trend A in Figure 2). This growth was described as intuitive and not well organised. The principal's reaction to the decline was to put more effort into marketing and promotion. However, there needed to be more adequate and effective plans to enable the school to shift and leap to what Handy (1994) describes as the second curve in the sigmoid curve. (See Trend B in Figure 2).

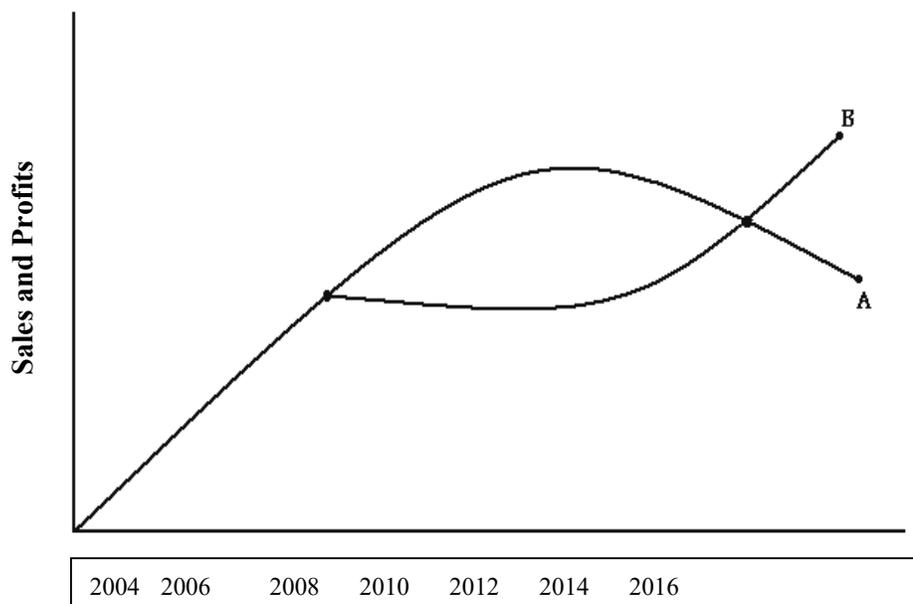


Figure 2. The Sigmoid Curve and the Second Curve

A change in the market was the basic reason for this decline. During the last few years, the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia carried out a considerable number of strategies and policies in order to improve and develop the Saudi educational structure. Many of these policies relate to the private sector of education. The government wants to assign a bigger role to the private sector in providing education to the masses. In 2010, a statement issued by the Ministry of Education authorized a large number of private schools to open in Riyadh. This environment inspired business people to

start investing into this field.

This rapid growth in the number of private educational institutions and schools led to a state of relative chaos in the private sector, especially for the new schools which were authorized before 2010, and AMPS was one of these schools was critically affected. Eventually, private schools found themselves in severe competition with each other for their market-share due to the relatively small marketplace.

However, the Saudi private education marketplace is predicted to grow and flourish in the forthcoming years. This is due to two main reasons. Firstly, private education is becoming an absolute necessity to match current lifestyles patterns. Secondly, there is quite a negative attitude towards public education in Saudi Arabia where people prefer to go private due to the historically poor performance of the state run system.

Research Methodology

Case Study Strategy

The school was analysed critically in order to gain information as the case study seeks to understand the nature and dimensions of its strategic planning process. According to Yin (2013) the essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of all case studies, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or a set of decisions: Why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result. The case study strategy was used due to the advantages it provides. Firstly, it focuses on contemporary strategies within the real-life context of an organisation. Secondly, it does not require control over behavioural events within the organisation (Woodside, 2010). Thirdly, a case study focuses on what takes place in a particular institution in a particular context. However, the most important concern when conducting a case study is that the investigator could be sloppy and could allow equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions (Yin, 2013). Moreover, the findings of a case study are not generalizable and applicable only to one particular context.

Data Collection

The collection of the data was based on the triangulation method where more than one method was employed, and this was aimed at providing the study with reliable and valid data. In this study two methods were used, namely, documents and interviews.

Documents provide useful support to collect data to study the leadership and management of an organisation. Documents are also used for other purposes, such as, to understand the development of an institution over time, to understand an institution's policy statement, mission statement, decision-making, and prospectus. Documents may be in the form of financial records, strategic plans, minutes of meetings, policy statements, or reports.

The interview is a crucial data collection tool for a study. It offers an opportunity to engage in two-way communication by enabling the interviewer to probe more information, and both the interviewer and the interviewee to ask for clarification. A survey of the school's staff was conducted. A semi-structured type of interview was carried out in order to cover all the required points and for exploring the possibilities of new ideas.

The researcher interviewed all of the current administrative staff and 12 members of teaching staff. The administrative staff interviewed included the principal, the principal assistant, the librarian, and the four receptionists. The aim of interviewing non-administrative staff is to provide the study with different measures of understanding of the strategy in the school. The interviews were in Arabic, and the researcher then translated them into English. (See appendix [1] for an English-translated copy of the interview questions together with the probes used.) The researcher interviewed the staff members individually in a designated room at the school for the case study. The interviews were audio-recorded for analysis and retrieval.

A letter with a copy of the interview questions was sent to the administration of the school explaining the aim of the study, and that the name of the school or any other names mentioned in this paper would be changed to pseudonymous in order to guarantee confidentiality for the school. The case study was only carried out after having received the

administration's consent to the study. With regard to the interviewees, the interview started with an explanation of the study and an assurance that the information obtained, although recorded, was anonymous.

The collected data were analysed in accordance with each of the interview questions and the school strategic documents, in order to try to find patterns and points of similarity and differences. The interview consists of eight questions. The first three questions aim at identifying the school's vision, mission, and objectives. The fourth question is to discover how the school is working to achieve its aims. The fifth and sixth questions attempt to assess the school's understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, and what effort and plans the school has to convert its weaknesses into strengths. The final two questions are aimed at discovering the school's understanding of the opportunities and threats that it faces, and how the threats are converted into opportunities.

Data Presentation and Interpretation

In testing the strategic practices at AMPS, there was an obvious gap between the principal's point of view and the members of staff. Some of the answers were even contradictory. Many of the interviewed staff demonstrated a lack of general strategic understanding, and some of them claimed that they had never heard about the strategy of the school before. Others said that strategic planning is the principal's job and they did not feel it was their concern. In fact, this gap was due to the lack of establishing strategic conversations between the leadership and members of staff. Davies and Davies (2006, 126) suggest that strategic conversation can build a strategic shared awareness and understanding in the school. Besides, most of the answers about strategic practices were about operational day-to-day concerns and showed little strategic managerial skills. Moreover, many managerial responsibilities, whether operational or strategic, were centred on some senior administrative individuals.

When asked about the strategy documents, it transpired that the school did not have any. This suggests that strategies only existed in the heads of certain people which caused confusion in the decision-making process for all the other members of staff.

The School's Vision, Mission, and Objectives

The school's vision, as the principal said, was to develop the school into new branches and even to franchise. On the other hand, none of the members of staff had any idea about this vision; their answers were different to the principal's and divided into two categories. The first was to develop the school to be a premier provider in Riyadh with an increased market-share. The second was to expand the school's premises within the same location. The disparity of the participants' insights suggests that the school lacked a shared vision. However, the vision is most effective when shared by all members of an institution (Lumby, 2002).

When asking the principal about the mission, he said that the school mission *is to develop the students' skills and qualifications to meet the job-market requirements through excellent teaching and service and with fair profit*. Unfortunately, this statement was not written. The principal justified this by claiming that a mission did not need to be written to be shared, and that every staff member of staff had a clear understanding of these values. This seems highly contradictory with what Stott and Parr (1991, 45) suggest. The answers given by staff showed inconsistency with the principal's mentioned mission. The staff's answers were more concerned with the academic approach and with providing education for students through excellent teaching, and they mentioned nothing about profit.

As far as the objectives are concerned, they were clear and organised only on the part of the principal and his assistant. The objectives were measurable, achievable, and operational. The first objective was that the school was going to expand its premises in a new building in the same area in the next year. The new building was going to have a conference room, a video room, a large new library, and two more classrooms. The second objective was in the next two years to reach the school's maximum capacity of students. The third objective was for the school to possess the best quality staff over the next three years. These objectives seem to be positive in the sense that they are specific, manageable, achievable, and relevant to the mission and vision (Kotler and Fox, 1995, 100). Apart from the principal and his assistants, members of

staff did not mention any of these objectives. Their answers lacked any sense of pattern, and everyone made their own list of objectives for the school, most of which were irrelevant. Some were concerned with providing a better environment for learning. A member of staff went further by saying that the school's objective is to promote a national understanding through educating students about religion and culture; something that the principal had never actually mentioned.

Plans for implementing the objectives

The school had several plans that helped it achieve its aims and objectives and translate them into action. The plans, as described by the principal, were about staff training, curriculum development, and marketing enhancement. The biggest concern for the principal was the professional development as it had a fundamental effect on whole school performance, an idea which was suggested similarly by Bolam (2002, 103). The principal mentioned that the school was running several teacher training programmes for existing teachers in order to help them develop their methodological approaches and ideas. He also said that this would hopefully help the school to gain better performance from its teachers. The principal added that he was selective when choosing new teaching staff; only *quality* teachers were recruited.

Another plan was to increase the school's orientation towards marketing. The school put a lot of effort into developing the curriculum to match market needs. In fact, this is a major concern towards marketing orientation as Kotler and Fox (1995, 277) point out. The school was also adding new facilities for the staff and students, so that higher levels of satisfaction could be achieved. Student and parent satisfaction was a major factor for maintaining customer loyalty. Moreover, the school was concerned about improving social activities for the students, such as trips and parties.

Unfortunately, these plans were not documented, and they were only mentioned by the principal and his assistant. When asking the staff about future plans, they could mention only a few. The plans for the staff were not clear and they were gained only from what they could observe themselves. Some of the staff said that they did not know of any plans. One of the teachers argued:

I am only a teacher in this school; my job is to teach not to think of plans for the school. I can think of many plans for my lessons. (*pause*) I think the best person to answer this question is the principal himself... I think it is not very good for the principal to tell everybody about his plans; they should be secrets unless other schools had the same plans.

(Participant 7)

Strengths and Weaknesses

The school enjoyed a considerable number of strengths that were invested in an effective manner. First, the school's location is one of its main advantages; it is in a central location in Riyadh with easy access to the main roads. This location allows larger area of potential students from Riyadh' city centre as well as the city's suburbs. Sullivan and Adcock (2011), Al-Fattal and Ayoubi (2012) Jobber, D. & Ellis-Chadwick, F (2013) believe that location is one of the major strengths and factors of success for an institution. The second strength was that the school had a high calibre of teaching staff. The teaching staff employed were well qualified, some of whom were teachers with excellent local reputation. Third, the school offered quality courses at reasonable prices, something that not all of the competitors could offer. Forth, the relatively long and positive history of the school in the market, and its loyal customers, were important strength points. According to the participants, the school enjoyed a positive word-of-mouth reputation in the marketplace. Finally, one of the teachers said:

I believe that the most important strength is the creative leadership of the school; the way they promote the friendly environment among students and staff is brilliant. They always have new ideas for improving the school, which enables the school to be a leader in the marketplace.

(Participant 14)

When the principal was asked about the way the school was investing its strengths, he replied with:

Building on the existing strengths is a non-stop process. For example, although we have some of the best members of teaching staff, we never stop improving and developing our staff. In addition, we need all prospective students to know our strengths, and this is being achieved through the school's promotional campaigns.

(Participant 1)

The weaknesses mentioned were built on each interviewee's point of view. The principal, for instance, mentioned:

I think that the most significant weakness of the school is that the school is managed by one person, and there is no well-structured managerial system. (*pause*) I honestly say that I used to be a teacher and I have no experience with the new managerial methods. I know that many things need to be changed, but we are waiting for the right time to do this.

(Participant 1)

The principal's assistant added 'the school needs change. The managerial system that was used during the early years of the school is no longer effective' (Participant 2). The school's reaction to this weakness was to provide managerial training to one of the principal's assistants. Another weakness mentioned by the principal assistant was with regard to human resources. The staff had low orientation and commitment towards the school. A noticeable fact was the low retention and high turn-over of staff. Two of the teacher participants mentioned that the school had a high turnover of staff due to the point that competitors were head-hunting members of staff with the incentive of higher salaries.

When asking the teaching staff about the school's weaknesses, they were concerned with academic points and classroom resources. They claimed that the school had poor information technology teaching materials when compared to other schools. Other teachers said that the students in their classes were not placed according to their academic and competency levels, and that the school should have a better placement and admission testing system. Another teacher complained about the high number of students per class and felt that this would impact negatively on performance.

Opportunities and Threats

The major opportunity mentioned was the general increase of demand for private schooling in Riyadh. The principal stated:

There are great opportunities for investment. We should give more attention to the growing role of private education in Saudi Arabia. Private education nowadays is needed almost everywhere, but we should find the best way to cater for the variety of demand. This can be achieved through offering a wider variety of specific courses. I could say, for example, that the trend nowadays is to offer new courses and nurture students' talents. We should be the first among other schools to offer such courses.

(Participant 1)

Similarly, Kotler and Fox (1995) suggest when designing a program there should be a clear understanding of the general trends of consumers needs. Another opportunity was represented through space investment, by agreeing contracts with companies or organizations to provide them with the space to offer evening training on the school premises. However, no plans were mentioned about how to seize such an opportunity.

The most dangerous threat for the school was the competition from other providers. Actually, the rapid growth of a number of providers was really surprising. Eventually, this would affect each school's market-share. In turning this threat into an opportunity the principal's assistant mentioned, is likely that the promotional activities undertaken by our competitor raise the awareness of customer, I mean parents, to their need of private education. It is our duty to make our school the right place to fulfil their needs and aspiration in learning'.

The principal argued 'it is good to have such a competing environment, because it is encouraging the school to do its best'.

Conclusion

This study has investigated strategy and strategic planning in practice aiming at developing and improving these practices. In the first part, some of the literature related to the topic was presented. The second part conducted an empirical case study of AMPS, a private school in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The case study suggests some key issues to be considered by the school when planning strategically. The strategic process starts by setting out the main aim of an institution, through setting its vision, mission, and objectives. Then, the school analyses its environment and resources. Next, the findings suggest that there should be plans that can translate its aims into action. The plan is about how to achieve the school's aims in a specific environment and with specific resources. These plans should also consider the structural and cultural changes. The case study suggested the SWOT analysis tool to help the school to plan strategically.

When investigating AMPS strategy in practice, there were some facts to be considered. First, the school lacked the shared vision, mission, and objectives among its members of staff. This was due to the fact that the institution did not have any documented papers outlining its aims and plans, as well as having a lack of strategic conversations. The staff lacked a general sense of direction, and every member seemed to establish their own. In building a shared vision, mission, and objectives, the study suggests that these should be established in a collective way, in order to guarantee staff commitment. Another interesting fact was that the principal did not delegate; he was wholly responsible for many operational and strategic management tasks. However, if he delegates and allocates operational managerial tasks to someone else, he would have more time to concentrate on strategic practices.

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الإدارة الإستراتيجية في التعليم الخاص ما قبل التعليم الجامعي في المملكة العربية السعودية دراسة حالة

عمير يتيم العنزي*

ملخص

ناقشت هذه الدراسة قضايا الإدارة الاستراتيجية في التعليم الخاص ما قبل الجامعي في المملكة العربية السعودية، حيث تهتم المدارس الخاصة بشكل كبير بالاستثمار وريادة الأعمال ولكن تقتصر إلى الأبحاث الأكاديمية، ولذلك هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى ردم هذه الفجوة. ناقش الجزء الأول من الدراسة القضايا النظرية فيما يتعلق بالإدارة الاستراتيجية مع التركيز على القطاع التعليمي. وناقش الجزء الآخر دراسة حالة لمدرسة خاصة في مدينة الرياض. ومن أجل تحقيق الهدف استخدمت المقابلات الشخصية، وتحليل الوثائق ومذكرات للباحث. وأظهرت النتائج عددا من الثغرات فيما يتعلق بالتخطيط الاستراتيجي والإدارة. ومن بينها عدم وضوح الرؤية، والرسالة والقيم. وهناك أيضا فجوة في فهم القضايا الاستراتيجية الرئيسية، على سبيل المثال، دور المعلم في القضايا الاستراتيجية.

الكلمات الدالة: التخطيط، الإدارة الاستراتيجية، الرؤية، الرسالة، القيم، التعليم الخاص، المملكة العربية السعودية.

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