# Improving quality in higher education institutions in developing countries through strategic planning

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**Abstract**
Strategic Planning is essential for quality management in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as it enables stakeholders to work towards a common goal, adjusting institutional operations towards the dynamic quality concept. This paper provides an overview of strategic planning, justifying the need for a Strategic Plan (SP) and how it can be developed and implemented effectively in the HEIs in developing countries for continuous quality improvement. Data were obtained from review of literature and analysed using the narrative synthesis approach. The paper argues that HEIs need SPs as a framework for determining the quality direction the institutions should follow to achieve their desired future. Advantages of strategic planning include; allowing relevant institutional constituencies to participate in governance, synchronising plans towards accomplishing institutional goals; prioritising for efficient allocation of resources; and engaging stakeholders for collective ownership of institutional agenda. SPs should be developed based on internal and external environmental scan for institutional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; and then aligned with institutional mission, vision, values and goals. Issues for consideration in strategic planning in HEIs may include academic (teaching, research and extension) matters, institutional governance, finance, physical infrastructure, ICT, human resource, advancement, internationalisation, and recreation. Challenges of strategic planning and implementation in the HEI in developing countries include resource constraints, inadequate expertise and commitment, as well as resistance to change. For effective implementation the SP, there should be an implementation plan that details who should do what at what time, and with which resources. Successful strategic planning and implementation depend on qualified and committed planners, implementers, monitors and evaluators, who should work collaboratively with relevant stakeholders of the institution. Anything short of this, could lead to SPs that are shoddily developed, not implementable or poorly implemented, thus, defeating the intended purpose of quality improvement for institutional effectiveness and competitive advantage.

**Keywords:** strategic planning, strategic plan implementation, quality management, quality improvement, higher education institutions, developing countries

## Introduction
Continuous improvement is an important philosophy in managing quality in higher education as it empowers the institutions to survive competition in the global market. Higher Education Institutions (HEI) need to make strategic decisions in their management systems and allocate scarce resources efficiently (Benjamin & Carroll, 1998) [11]. for best institutional quality outcomes in order to stay competitive in the global market. For the HEIs to be able to achieve the desired level of quality, they need to strategise to orientate their services towards the changing needs of their customers, clients, stakeholders and constituencies. One of the best ways to ensure this is through the development and implementation of a Strategic Plan (SP) that responds to the global market demands. Strategic planning has, therefore, been embraced as a decision-making tool in HEIs worldwide (Hassanien, 2017) [32]. for continuous quality improvement.

However, while virtually all the HEIs in developed countries have strategic plans, with some even making it available on their websites (Hayward. 2006 [33]: Hughes & White, 2005) [35]. strategic planning is largely a recent phenomenon in HEIs in developing countries. It is argued (Dooris, 2003 [26]: Leslie, & Fretwell, 1996) [42]. Mensah, 2019) that, while HEIs institutions in developed countries have been able to "transform themselves through strategic planning, many of such institutions in the

developing countries have stumbled or failed in that regard or not attempted it at all, due, in part, to their inability to understand, design and implement SPs. It is further argued (Allen, 2003 [3]; Hinton, 2012 [34]; Leslie, & Fretwell, 1996) [42]. that, although some of the HEIs in developing countries have followed the path of their counterparts in the advanced countries by developing SPs, a number of others have not. What some of the HEIs in developing have traditionally been doing is to develop policies, regulation, and other structures to guide them in running the institutions but a number of them are not conversant with the development and implementation of a formal strategic plan.

Strategic planning has been profusely discussed in the literature (Albrechts & Balducci, 2013 [2]: George, & Desmidt, 2014 [30]: Andrews,. Boyne, Law &. Walker. 2009 [4]: Mintzberg, 1994) [45], yet little is known about the factors that lead to successful strategic planning and implementation in some HEIs in developing countries. Hinton (2012) [34]. observes that "*a wide variety of individuals have misconstrued the role of strategic planning in the academy. A great number of individuals are unaware of the necessary components of a strategic plan and what is required to implement and sustain such a plan. Some of the misinformed are consultants in occupations that serve the post-secondary community, and others are members of a college or university. Regardless of their relationship to the academic*

*enterprise, those who misunderstand or are uninformed about planning practice can be a serious detriment to successful planning".* This suggests that, there is a need for a clearer overview of strategic planning and implementation because despite the abundance of literature on the subject matter, there is little erudition about it HEIs (Auld; 2010 [7]: Mensah, 2019), but more so in the HEIs in developing countries, in terms of its benefits, how it can be developed and implemented to support quality improvement to enhance institutional identity, image, and reputation, which can lead to as increase in competitive advantage.

According to Nataraja and Bright (2018) [46], some HEIs claim to have prioritised strategic planning yet the development and implementation of the SP toward improving and sustaining the institutional identity, image, and reputation has been lacking as they often struggle with the development of SPs, l*et al*one implementing them. Questions of pertinence to be answered based on this background are; what is a Strategic Plan? Why do HEIs need to have SPs? How can a strategic plan be developed and implemented effectively? The objective of this is to provide an overview of strategic planning and implementation to help understand the concept, its relevance and how it an be developed and implemented in the HEI environmental context, with particular reference to developing countries.

## Methodology

The paper used the narrative review method. Narrative review is the "traditional" way of reviewing the extant literature using mainly qualitative interpretation of prior knowledge (Sylvester, Tate & Johnstone, 2013 [61]: Paré, Trudel, Jaana & Kitsiou, 2015). In other words, it attempts to synthesise existing information on a particular topic through summaries of accumulated literature to demonstrate the value of a particular point of view (Sylvester et. al, 2013 [61]: Pare 2015). The primary purpose of narrative review is to provide a comprehensive background information for understanding current knowledge in a given subject matter and highlighting other relevant areas of significance for new research (Cronin, Ryan & Coughlan, 2008 [23]: Darlow & Wen, 2015) [24]. This paper provides a narrative overview of the literature synthesizing the findings of literature retrieved from searches of computerized databases, hand searches, and authoritative texts. The review followed a six-step approach namely, formulating the tropic formulating the objective and research questions, searching extant literature using keyword and phrases, screening for inclusion; extracting and analysing relevant information, and writing the review paper. To provide clear answers to the research questions, literature from electronic databases, mainly Crossref, Scopus, and *Google Scholar* as well as grey literature were used. The search was performed using the following terms and phrases: strategic planning, quality management, quality improvement, and implementation of strategic plan in HEIs. The search produced 914 materials.but through screening using a predetermined exclusion and inclusion criteria, 33 documents were finally reviewed. The criteria were language, relevance, credibility, currency and intelligibility. As far as language was concerned, the search considered only materials in English because that was the only language the researchers were conversant with. Relevance means that the material must have contributed or be contributing substantially to the ESM discourse as gleaned from the cogency of the augments being advanced by

the material. Intelligibility means that the document must be orderly, clear and articulate in terms of presentation of material. Currency means that the material must be influential in the debate on Strategic Planning and implementation in organisations with particular emphasis on HEIs as evidenced, for example, by citations and references.

Two people, the principal researcher and a research assistant conducted the search from August 12 to December 28, 2019. The two reviewed each of the identified articles independently to determine eligibility and extract relevant information. In order not to miss some potentially relevant literature, reference lists of retrieved documents were scanned for materials relevant to the topic under study. After the initial screening based on abstracts, the selected documents were read to determine which ones were eligible for inclusion. The duplicates were eliminated but age of the material was not and exclusion criterion.

The extracted pieces of information were collated, organized, aggregated, summarised, compared and synthesised. There are several approaches (e.g., grounded theory, narrative analysis, meta-ethnography) for synthesizing qualitative data or information (Mensah, 2019: Templier & Paré, 2015) [63]. Thomas & Harden 2008). This study used that qualitative synthesise approach. That is, for each thematic area, the central arguments in the literature were repeatedly summarised until a concise piece was obtained, making sure that no relevant information was left out. All processes, including issues of inclusion and exclusion as well as analysis were discussed to reach an agreement at each level before proceeding to the next. Based on lessons learnt from the reviewed, literature, conclusions were drawn.

## Quality management in HEIs

As important as quality is, there is little consensus, if any all, with regard to its definition because quality is a dynamic, multidimensional and perspective-dependent concept. Scholars and researchers have found several descriptions for quality by way of attempting to define it. Most of the definitions for quality relate to; degree of excellence, conformance to requirements, totality of characteristics which act to satisfy a need, fitness for use, fitness for purpose, freedom from defects and delighting customers (Allen 2003 [3]; Hinton, 2012 [34]: Poter, 1998). Although quality has been variously defined, a substantial number of scholars seem to agree that quality connotes "fitness for purpose" – meeting or conforming to generally accepted standards (Williams & Cappuccini-Ansfield, 2007) [72].

Quality management is the act of overseeing all activities and tasks needed to maintain a desired level of excellence (Allen 2003 [3]; (Jawad, Jamshaid, Wahab, 2015) [37]. This includes the determination of a quality policy, creating and implementing quality planning, quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement (Bayraktar *et al*., 2008 [9]. Hassanien 2017 [32]; Ursin *et al.*, 2008) [67]. It is normally referred to as Total Quality Management (TQM).since the processes have to involve all relevant stakeholders. In general, quality management focuses on long-term goals through the implementation of short and medium-term initiatives. The purpose of TQM is to ensure continuous quality improvement. Quality management in the HEI system in developing countries is complex because it touches on almost all facets of the system (Hayward, 2006) [33]. Therefore, it should be well planned if it is to achieve its purpose of continuous improvement.

## The concept of strategic planning

Strategic planning is composed of two words or concepts—'strategy' and 'planning'. Strategy is about making a series of unique decisions to get to a particular goal from a starting point (Corrall 1996 [21]: Kukreja, 2013). In the HEI context, strategy refers to the *direction*, which achieves *advantage* for the institution through its configuration of *resources* within a changing *environment*, to fulfil *stakeholder* expectations." (Corral 1996 [21]: Johnson & Scholes, 1999) [38]. Planning, on the other hand, according to De Andreis (2019) [25], refers to the process of thinking and preparing a sequence of action steps to achieve some specific goal. It is anticipatory decision-making, involving a process of deciding what to do, why it should be done, how to do it and when to do it before action is required (Elbanna, Andewas & Pollanen 2016 [27]; Chakraborty, Kaza, Knaap, & Deal, 2011) [19].

Various views have been expressed about the meaning of strategic planning. For instance, Steiner (1977) [59]. sees strategic planning as a managerial process of developing and maintaining a viable fit between the institution's objectives and resources, and its changing environment. Liedtka (1998) [43]. as cited in Kefa (2014) [40], defines strategic planning as a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it. Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1997) [57]. perceive *strategic planning* as a formal process designed to help an organization to identify and maintain optimal alignment with the most important elements of its environment". Strategic planning, according to Corrall (1996) [21]. is essentially about deciding and refining institutional objectives and working to translate those objectives into actions and outcomes. Porter 1998 adds to Corrall's view by stating that this requires insight and foresight to interpret past events and present trends to determine future directions.

Strategic planning is a process for deciding what the HEI, viewed as a corporate whole, must get right in order to thrive now and in the foreseeable future (Andrews, Boyne, Law,. Walker, 2012 [5]; Dooris 2003 [26]; Hinton, 2012) [34]. The HEI should see SP as a systematic process where stakeholders make decisions about future outcomes, how the outcomes are to be accomplished and evaluated. SP consists of (i) management's fundamental assumptions about the economic, technological, and competitive environment (ii) setting of goals to be achieved, performance of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and threats (SWOT) [Bryson, 2011; Hassanien 2017] [32]. Analysis, selecting main and alternative strategies to achieve the goals (v) formulating, implementing and monitoring the operational or tactical plans to achieve set objectives. Many academics, and practitioners in the field of planning agree that by defining a collective vision and charting a course aligned with this vision through strategic planning. The institution can effectively respond to unforeseen challenges in advantageous ways (Barnetson, 2001 Hartley, Alford, & Hughes. (2015: Freedman, 2013) [29]. From the foregoing it can be argued that, there is a relationship between strategic planning and quality management in the HEI system. Just like a business entity in the organisational environment, a HEI can use strategic planning to predict quality changes in the institutional environment and position the institution to respond to the anticipated changes by strategizing to ensure continuous improvement

HEIs in developing countries must have an edge in the marketplace that differentiates them from other institutions in order to be competitive. Their ability to do this, as Bryson and Bromiley. (1993) [15]. have argued, is closely associated with the quality of their products which should be continuously improved due to the dynamic nature of the concept of quality as occasioned by the changing market demands. This implies that quality management in the HEI setting must be planned. Quality planning in this sense is the task of determining what factors and conditions are important to quality improvement in the institution and finding ways regarding how to meet those conditions (Bell, 2002 [10]: Covin, Slevin & Schulz, 1994).. This is the essence of strategic planning (Bryson, Crosby, Bryson. 2009 [16]: Elbanna, Andrews & Pollanen, 2016 [27]: Ferlie & Ongaro, 2015) [28]. for quality improvement for institutional effectiveness in the HEI system.

## Need for Strategic Planning in HEIs

This section provides justification for strategic planning in the context of higher education institutions, with particular emphasis on HEIs in developing countries. One key justification for the need for strategic Plan in HEIs in developing countries is that those institutions have limited financial resources to operate, therefore, they need to optimise the available resources through effective prioritisation for purposes of efficient allocation of resources. Inadequate resources require them to have clear line-of-sight in the form of a SP towards how to allocate resources and to what end. Prioritisation through strategic planning enables the institution to have clearly defined institutional direction, focussing on high impact areas based on their mandate, mission and vision This leads to efficient utilisation of scarce resources for institutional effectiveness since resources will be channelled to where they are most needed. According to Benjamin and Carroll, (1998) [11], HEI are obliged to "pursue greater mission differentiation to streamline their services in order to better respond to the changing needs of their constituencies". This argument is further reinforced by Obanya (2002) [49]. who opines that strategic planning allows the institutions to determine the strategically important areas for which resources would be needed.

Strategic planning would help HEIs in developing countries to analyse the current conditions of the institution and forecast the future. This is done by examining the institutions' internal and external environment to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the institution. This helps in building on the strengths of the institution, taking advantage of the opportunities, improving on the weaknesses and eliminating or minimising the effects of the threats. Strategic Planning minimises risks as it provides information to assess risk and devise strategies to minimise them and pursue results-oriented opportunities (Johnson& Scholes, 1999 [38]; Karr & Kelley, 1996 [39]: Percoco, 2016) [51]. With strategic planning, chances of making mistakes and choosing wrong lines of action are reduced although they cannot be completely avoided or overcome. Thompson, Strickland and Gamble (2013) opine that corporate organisation, including HEIs in developing countries need to have strategically structured processes for identifying opportunities risks in order to sustain and accelerate the growth momentum and this can be achieved principally through strategic planning

HEIs in developing countries need to develop SPs because some governments, donors and funders demand a formal SP for funding and grant approval. Besides Strategic Planning can provide opportunities for collaborations with other HEIs and partnership with industries and employers for mutual benefits. That is, by developing and making the SP available to development partners, those that share the visionary plans of the institution can fund some of the activities outlined in the plan or collaborate with the institution to undertake some activities and projects earmarked to be undertaken. Additionally, as noted by Srinivasa Rao, Kumar and & Aithal, (2015) [58]. SPs not only guide institutional activities towards institutional goals but also unify institutional efforts towards the institutional goals. It guides the institutions to undertake planned activities and to become what they want to become. Since SPs focus on specific goals, they make it clear for institutions to know the direction towards which they have to move to achieve the desired future.

Strategic Planning provides the opportunity to involve stakeholders in the running of the institution. Stakeholders are the authors of the strategic choices to be made and the strategic actions to be taken during the planning process. Obanya (2017) describes stakeholders as the determinants and determiners of the progress of the institution. As determinants, stakeholders are those whose concerns determine what is desirable; and as determiners, they are the ones whose judgements and perceptions serve as the eventual indicators of success. Luxton [29] also stated that strategic planning, if well done could lead to institutional ability to respond thoughtfully and appropriately to challenges, unified plans and action with clear lines of accountability; as well as effective assessment and reporting system for continuous quality improvement.

SPs are useful for institutional assessment for accreditation purposes. Accrediting commissions require documented evidence that all activities using institutional resources support the institution's mission. Accrediting commissions may ask the institution to show how its mission is being advanced through effective use of its resources especially where the institutions are government-owned. Institutions that have developed good strategic plans can easily pass these accreditation requirement tests which will enhance their credibility among their the public. Alessandri [22] claimed that the identity of an institution is its "strategically planned and purposeful presentation of itself in order to gain a positive corporate image in the minds of the public, which is established in order to gain a favourable corporate reputation over time".

Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1998) advance two major arguments, both of which highlight the need for good strategic planning by HEIs: (a) a change in the way HEIs make decisions to better visualize what they want to accomplish and then align resources to support that vision, and (b) a shift from emphasizing content delivery to emphasizing learning. Chance and Williams, (2009) continued that SP compels the Institutions to institute a process of "thorough self-examination, by discovering the opportunities that exist and may be exploited by the institution's primary constituencies, and by determining the relevant niches that are available and that fit its unique capacities, HEI can shape its own destiny" through strategic planning. It is gathered from this that using futuristic thinking, HEIs can become "learning organizations" that continually process information to acquire

and integrate new knowledge for improving practice, thereby sharpening their competitive edges in the global market.

Strategic planning allows HEIs to be more proactive than reactive in shaping their own future. In the HEI system, strategic planning leads to making smart choices that best respond to issues bordering on the dynamic quality management environment, using processes that are systematic and structured. The processes are aimed at building commitment or buy-in of the stakeholders to implement activities that results in continuous improvement. Strategic planning advances the focus of an institution because it generates a clear understanding of the institution's mission, vision and values among key stakeholders, present a road map for action based on what is happening now and provide benchmarks by which achievements of the institution can be measured. This implies that strategic planning stimulates institutional leadership and management to think ahead and also compels the institution to sharpen its objectives and policies. SP leads to better coordination of institutional efforts, provision of clear performance standards for control, and helps the institutions to understand the need and how to compete in the global market [24,25]. Lerner [26] cited in Nataraja & Bright (2018) [46]. summarises the benefits of strategic planning in higher education as follows:

- Creates a framework for determining the direction the institution should take to achieve its desired future;
- Allows all institutional constituencies to participate and work together, synchronising their plan towards accomplishing institutional goals;
- Encourages stakeholders to reflect creatively on innovative models for achieving competitive advantage
- Align the Institution with its mandate, vision, mission, strategic goals
- Allows the Institution to set priorities, targeting strategic areas of intuitional development significance for efficient allocation of resources
- Engages stakeholders in policy dialogue and ensures their collective ownership of institutional development endeavours.

Contrastingly, Corral (1996) [21], in summarising the relevance SP in the HEI setting stated that SP helps to: clarify organizational purpose and objectives; establish corporate directions and priorities; assess environmental drivers and constraints; identify critical issues and pressures; determine resource allocation and utilization; improve internal coherence and coordination; and inform operational decisions and actions. Similarly, other scholars have argued that reasons that justify the need for SP in HEI in developing countries include competitive labour market driven by globalisation, a decline in government funding of tertiary institutions, changing student demographics, and a need to compete with the emerging models of higher education while keeping the essence of a traditional comprehensive higher education. In the world of globalisation, HEIs which are able to develop and implement comprehensive SPs are the ones that able to deal with competitive forces of the global market because planning enable them to anticipate challenges and address them before they become worse or get out of hand. Therefore, is important is to have a defined game-plan for taking on the competition. (Thompson A, Strickland & Gabble, 2013 [65].

## Developing a strategic Plan for a Higher Education Institution in developing countries

This section presents how a SP can be developed for a HEI in a developing country. The planning process usually focuses on enhancing the quality of teaching, increasing research and scholarly outputs, and fostering community partnerships (De Andreis, 2019) [25]. Although aspects of strategic planning are common to all types of HEIs, the application of the planning processes needs to be carefully tailored to the institutional environment when applied by HEI in developing countries (Bryson, 2011). This is because the Planners have to build-in the perspectives and needs of those stakeholders of their respective institution with whom they must co-operate and collaborate in order to achieve institutional goals

Normally, the first thing to do towards developing a SP is to set up a SP Committee and charge the members with the responsibility of developing it. The scope of responsibilities of the Committee should be clearly spelt out to the Committee Members in the form of Terms of Reference. In order to bring broad-based insights to bear on deliberations of the committee, the Committee should be composed of representatives from all major stakeholder groups or units. The Committee could be adhoc or a standing one. While an adhoc SP committee could be disbanded after the plan has been developed, the standing committee continues to work after the development of the Plan by being involved in the implementation of the SP. One main benefit of an adhoc SP committee is that it creates room for other people to come on board, thus offering opportunities for fresh ideas. Proponents of a standing committee, on the other hand, argue that it provides the opportunity to draw on accumulated experience to improve the quality of work of the SP committee. The basis of this argument is that, not many people appointed to a planning committee usually have a working knowledge of strategic planning, or the broad institutional perspective to enable them do good job in the beginning. Therefore, as it takes time and experience to develop a functioning planning committee, if the committee is only formed to develop the plan, without participating in the implementation of the Plan, all the hard-won knowledge and experience is lost. The dynamics inherent in this complexity account for why stakeholders from the various functional areas are invited to constitute the SP Committee. This type of participatory learning increases the ability of the institution to appreciate how the planning process works and supports strategic thinking across the institution.

A SP provides the overall direction the institution intends to take guided by its mission, vision, values, strategic goals and benchmarks. All these must be defined within the framework of the institution's philosophy. The foundation of strategic planning rests on the institutional mission and vision statement, therefore, in developing a SP for HEI, the institutional mission ad vision should be stated first. The institutional mission statement should capture concisely why the institution exists and what its operations are intended to achieve. The mission statement of the HEI can also include an explanation of what the institution stands for and what it intends its students or products to become. Following the mission statement is the vision of the institution which is the institution's explicit description of what the institution intends to become within a given timeframe. The vision statement defines the institution's strategic position in the future and this must bear a relationship with the mission statement. The mission and vision statements provide the two ends of an analytical view of the institution from which the strategic plan is developed. While the mission and vision represent the current and envisioned state of the institution respectively, the SP is used to bridge the gap between the two.

In developing a SP for a HEI, the institution should also provide its core value statements, explaining what the institution stands for and the ways in which it intends to conduct its activities to achieve the mission, and vision. The core values statements should reflect the characteristics the institution believes are important in how it does its work and should be in conformity with societal values as well." The institution should also state the strategic goals and objectives, noting that goal and objective have different connotations and meanings. Institutional goals and objectives are the foundation, which measures how much distance it has covered to attain its vision (Steiner 1977 [59]; Nataraja & Bright 29018) While goals are the long term aims the HEI should endeavours to achieve, objectives are the specific milestones which the institution plans to achieve in a short period. The objectives must be precise, measurable, time-based, actions that assist in the achievement of goal. While objectives are means to an end, goals are the end results (Lerner, 1999: Robinson: 2005. Noteworthy is also the argument that, measuring and comparing the institution's operations, practices, and performance against others are useful as "best" practices. Therefore, the HEIs in developing countries could have benchmarks as a reference point for setting their own goals and targets against which the institution's performance with respect to the strategic planning and implementation can be measured.

Given the nature of the activities required to implement a SP in the HEI system in the developing country environment, and the need to assess the achievement of the Plan's implementation, it is advisable that the institutions use terms that encourage overarching directional guidance, and more specific terms for the parts of the plan requiring accountability and measurement ( Auld, 2010 [7]: Luxton, 2005) [44]. The SP of the institution, according to Dooris (2003) [26], should have a time frame and provide the framework for making budget decisions and decisions about resource allocation. It must also be ensured that the mission, vision, goals and objectives of the SP are aligned with each other and are mutually supportive.

Hughes and White (2005) [35]. have asserted that the process of strategic planning "requires some fundamental activities: these include discovering institutional strengths and weaknesses, looking to the environment in an attempt to discern potential threats and opportunities, and seeing how the institution can best respond to both" (Karr and Kelley 1996) [39]. Strategic planning in the HEI system is a process of realistic scanning of its environment and aligning or matching the institution to that environment. In this respect, it is imperative to analyse the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) for purposes of strategic planning SWOT analysis identifies factors that may affect desired future outcomes of the institution. The SWOT model is based on identifying the institution's strengths and weaknesses and threats and opportunities of the external environment, and consequentially identifying the institution's distinctive competencies and key success factors. These elements are crucial in assessing the strategic position of the institution. SWOT's objective is to recommend strategies that ensure the best

alignment between the external environment and internal situation (Andrews, 1980: Thompson & Stricland, 2003)

The SWOT analysis helps to build on the institution's strengths, minimize the weaknesses, take advantage of the opportunities, and deal with the threats. That is, it establishes the gap between the institution's current position, and its desired future and allows for the design of appropriate strategies and allocation of resources to close the gap (Huges 2005: Kefa, 2014) [40]. Furthermore benchmarks should be set for the Plan. Benchmarking is the systematic process of measuring and comparing the institution's operations, practices, and performance against the other institutions' standards. It is used within the strategic planning process to guide the management of institution in terms of best practices. (Lerner, Rolfes, Saad, & Soderlund, 1998);

Having done these, the framework of the Plan can be developed. The Planning Committee should spell out the key thrust of the strategic plan. For each key thrust, the actions and activities to be undertaken to achieve the thrust/goal should be outlined. Then there should be an overall responsible officer, who may be n described as the holder of the Institutional SP. There should also be the primary and secondary implementers of the activities and actions for each key thrust. These are followed by the targets for each of the action/activity with timelines for it to be achieved. The key actions normally relate to the objective, while the activities refers to what should be done to achieve the objective. The key responsible person for all these is the institutional head (the holder) but because he/she cannot do it all by himself/herself, that is why primary and secondary implementers are appointed to actually undertake the activities. Using a university as an example of HEIs, the holder coud be the Vice-Chancellor, the primary implementer of an action or activity at the College or Faculty level could be the Provost of College or Dean of Faculty, while the secondary implementer could be the Deans of Faculty or Head of Department/Unit. It should be noted that the plan should cover academic, administrative and support services. The SP should outline the steps to be followed and actions to be taken to achieve the goals and objectives of plan(s). The action plan should indicate responsible individuals and units, timelines, resources, key performance indicators for specific activities, as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Mensah, 2019)

In case of reporting, the bottom-up approach is the case, implying that the unit heads should report to the Heads of Department, who in turn report to the Deans, then to the provosts and from the Provosts to the institutional Head who, in the case of a University, may be the Vice Chancellor or the Chancellor. However, it is often the case that, the SP Implementation Committee is appointed to co-ordinate the implementation of the Plan. The Implementation Committee or any entity appointed for implementation of the SP collates reports from the various collages, faculties, departments, sections and units of the institution and presents a composite report to the institutional management for decision making.

The Planners must note that the core functions of the institution are teaching and learning, research, and community engagement, therefore academic, administrative and support services should be geared towards these. Among other issues, the Plan must take care of teaching and learning, research, human resource management, Information Technology (IT), physical infrastructure, revenue mobilisation, recreation or sports, equity,

institutional advancement and internationalisation. The Planner could also make use of the Balance Scorecard which is normally applied in the business enterprise. A Balanced Scorecard is a strategy performance management tool – a semi-standard structured report that, can be used by the institutional managers to keep track of the execution of activities by the staff within their control and to monitor the consequences arising from these actions (Atkinson, 2006; Niven, 2002; Northcott, Deryl; Taulapapa, Tuivaiti Ma'amora, 2012). Furthermore, Ioppolo, Saija, and Salomone, (2012) and have maintained that it is basically a performance management report used by a management team, and typically this team is focused on managing the implementation of a strategy or operational activities. The Balance Scorecard could serve as a form of monitoring and evaluation mechanism for implementing the SP.

Based on the institution-wide SP the various, Colleges, faculties, departments and units should also develop their unit level strategic Plans. In the words of Mensah (2019), this implies that the institution-wide SP must be comprehensive and robust enough to accommodate the departmental strategic plans and policies. In other words, the departmental SPs should be designed based on the institutional SP to ensure synergy among the goals and objectives so that achievement of the various departmental objectives and goals will invariably lead to achievement of the institutional goal and objectives. It must be ensured that, there are linkage among all plans. Above all, it should be ensured that the planning processes are linked and the components are aligned with to make them mutually supportive.

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**Implementing a strategic plan in a HEI setting**

Literature on strategic planning and implementation generally remains, diverse and fragmented. Barney, (1991) states that planning and implementing SP has to do with making sure that the necessary inputs are provided as foreseen and that the activities outlined are carried out as scheduled to generate the desired output and outcomes. Implementing a strategic plan involves executing the actions and activities in Plan, monitoring, reporting, and communicating progress, as well as evaluating and reviewing the implementation. The implementation of the Plan requires the development of an Implementation Plan (IP) by the SP Implementation Committee. The Implementation Plan should have metrics to monitor progress made on achieving the institutional strategic plans. It must be noted that, the successful implementation of the institutional SP hinges on the institution's ability to turn strategic thoughts into operational actions.

The implementation plan should be clear and directive (Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke. 2016) It should assign responsibilities for implementing actions and indicate timelines for each action as well as measures to assess and evaluate the actions. Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003) argue that it is advisable to identify a persons who have the authority to ensure that actions are undertaken and make him/her accountable for overseeing completion of the action. The IP should take into consideration the resources that will be needed to execute the plan. It is worthy to note that 'resource' here is defined broadly to include: people, time, space, technology, and funds. The IP should be flexible enough to allow for revision as and when necessary in order to respond to changing environmental factors

As already indicated, the various entities, such as Colleges, Faculties, Departments, Directorates in a University, are supposed to develop their SPs based on the instructional SP. The SP Implementation Committees should develop, maintain, and update the repository system for progress reports (Mensah , 2019). At specific intervals, the Committees should request all entities in the institutions to submit progress report, detailing both in quantitative and qualitative terms, what has been achieved, what remains to be achieved, reasons for inability to undertake activities that were supposed to have been undertaken in their respective divisions/units in support of their priority objectives. These reports should be collated for management of the institution's decision making. The Head of Institution should facilitate a review and analysis of the Units' periodic progress reports, and develop from the review and analysis a composite Strategic Plan Progress Report reflecting the progress across all the divisions/units..

Apart from the regular periodic reports, there should be mid-term review and report. In the mid-term, the Institutional Management and Strategic Plan Implementation Committee should discuss the Institutional *Strategic Plan Progress Report* to know what has been achieved, what remains to be achieved in order to know if there is the need to revise some portions of the SP or the implementation Plan. The result of this review should be communicated broadly within and across institution. Ultimately, this process informs the strategic direction and allocation of resources, within and across the institution.

Another set of assessment point (Full Cycle Review) of the SP occurs just prior to the plan's end date ( Andrews,. Boyne, Law, Walker, 2012) [5]. The by this time the regular monitoring and assessment processes will have produced documented achievement on a year-by-year basis, but it is important to reflect on this achievement and begin to learn how much can be accomplished through planning process. This assessment produces a final accounting of achievement for the life of the strategic plan. For this reason it is also important to document accomplishments not originally included in the plan. These extra achievements are important because they represent the institution's ability to be flexible, take advantage of unforeseen opportunities, and still maintain focus on meeting goals that move toward the institutional vision. In short periodic evaluations of strategies and action plans are essential to assessing the success of the strategic planning process. It is important to measure performance at least annually (but preferably more often), to evaluate the effect of specific actions on long-term results and on the organization's vision and mission (Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997) [57]. The institution should measure current performance against previously set expectations and benchmarks, and consider any changes or events that may have impacted the desired course of actions. After assessing the progress of the strategic planning process, the institution should review the strategic plan, make necessary changes, and adjust its course based on these evaluations.

According to Bell (2002) [10]. as cited in Kefa (2014) [40], implementation of strategic Plan cannot succeed without commitment of the implementers and the stakeholders. Implementation of strategic plan should therefore not be carried out in isolation by experts alone, but rather as an inclusive process in which the implementers and stakeholders are actively involved in one way or another. There should be communication and dialogue, for promoting understanding and ownership of what is being strategically planned for the institution.

Finally, it is important to stress that for effective planning and implementation of the SP, the implementation processes of the SP needs to be coordinated. In this direction, the institution can have a standing committee for strategic planning and implementation Alternatively, the Committee could be adhoc, implying that the institutions can select representatives from the major stakeholder groups to serve on a planning committee with the intention that, once the plan has been developed, the committee ceases to exist. The same applies to the implementation committee. While it can argued that the adhoc committees members may inject new ideas into the process, the advantage of the standing committee is that members can draw on their experience in participating in the planning process to undertake effective monitoring, implementation and evaluation. It is for these dynamics and complexities that it is advisable to select the Committee members from the various functional areas of the institution. Committee members must be able know and justify why a process or step must be given priority over another (Tama, 2015), or why a particular thrust, activity, action or target, is no longer as relevant in year three of the plan as it was in year one. Finally, it is vital to make stakeholders understand how the planning and implementation processes work in order to secure their buy-in. Members of the committee, such as students, faculty, and administrators who normally need to rotate off the committee, can be replaced. Such a rotation allows new people to learn from the committee, while the replaced members take their knowledge back with them to their departments. It is argued that, this type of participatory learning increases the ability of the entire institution to understand how the strategic planning and implementation processes work and supports strategic thinking for quality improvement across the institution..
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## Challenges of strategic planning in HEIs in developing countries

.The review reflects the consensus that strategic planning is important for quality improvement which is a prerequisite for competitive advantage. However, strategic planning can be a, onerous task in the HEI system because such institutions are typically large and complex entities. As complex institutions, developing and implementing a SP in a HEI involve intricate and complex processes with inherent challenges that could constitute a barrier to them. Chance and Williams (2016) mince no words in this regard by opining that implementing change through strategic planning in HEIs has been exceedingly difficult due to high levels of unpredictability. This section presents the key challenges of SP development and implementation to assist institutional managers in developing countries in the development and implementation of the SP in their respective institutions.
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One of the major barrier to strategic planning and implementation in HEIs in developing countries is financial constraints. Both the planning and implementation process entail huge cost. Kefa 2014 notes that, in their bid to compete in the global market (Kefa, 2014) [40], HEIs tend to develop ambitious Strategic Plans which involve a lot of financial resources to implement. However, most of the HEIs in developing countries are not financially well

endowed to enable them bear the cost of planning let alone the cost of implementing them. To address this challenge, the institutions need to develop realistic SPs instead of over ambitious ones and also find innovative ways to generate more income in order to be able to fund the planning and implementation of their SPs.

A lack of ownership and resistance to change also presents a challenge to effective strategic planning and implementation in HEIs in developing countries. Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1998) as well as Mensah (2019) pointed out that, inertia, resistance to change, and the need for consensus among stakeholders all slow the change process in the HEIs in the developing countries. They further argue that the strongest resistance often occurs at the implementation stage. In some cases, the key people in the institution may not be involved in the planning processes and so they do not own the Plan, hence, they do not get actively involved in the implementation of the Plan. In other instances, some individual or group of staff of the institution may simply resist change because the change may not be in their favour if they are implemented. In order to avoid these challenges, there is the need for HEIs' management to encourage active participation of stakeholders, including, faculty, administration, students, and alumni, at all stages of the SP. The various stakeholders must be engaged in dialogues, and involved in the strategic planning processes to generate a feeling of ownership of the Plan. This means that, Planners should serve as" facilitators, and "catalysts to guide the planning process effectively" by encouraging full participation of the stakeholders (Hax & Majluf, 1996). Where the challenge is the result of sheer resistance to change, the authorities of the institution must be bold enough to a combination of persuasion and force to enable the institution implement the planned change.

Strategic planning is often derived directly from corporate futures research. Hinton (2012) [34]. indicates that this is often a challenge because simply superimposing corporate practice onto academic institutions does not take into consideration the existence of a unique faculty culture, which may not be wholly compatible with corporate culture. Because the responsibility for planning is largely administrative, planners often have difficulty engaging faculty in the planning process. Differences in the values systems of administrative and collegial culture can produce a tension that can become a serious obstacle to planning.

Another challenge of strategic planning is ensuring commitment of the staff of the institution, both top management and other staff. In addition, there is often a great deal of internal competition among self-contained departments who may be more loyal to their discipline than to the institution-wide SP *(Taylor and Knarr 1999)* Commitment of the people throughout the institution "grows out of a sense of ownership of the project" (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 172) [45]. Such commitment, according to Mintzberg (1994) [45], is essential to success because SP thrives on institution-wide participation, which can only be achieved if people believe that their involvement counts, and that they will benefit from the process The environment for most HEI in developing countries is often volatile and variable, not static and predicable; it is challenge-dependent and not time-dependent, yet, most SPs are time bound. The HEIs can either revise their plans and priorities as the world evolves during life-span of the SP or ignore what is no longer relevant in their plans and rather

as they respond to new challenges and pursue emergent opportunities.

In spite of the fact that HEIs abound in talents, a HEI in the developing countries may lack the specialist expertise to conduct a full institutional strategic planning process without some support from elsewhere. Lack of the requisite knowledge and experience can lead to SPs that are only partially developed, not implementable, or skewed to some aspects of the institutional needs to the neglect of others. Therefore, in the event of lack of expertise for SP in the institution, the Institution should not hesitate in hiring the services of a consultant with the appropriate background to facilitate the process. It is only dedicated planners whether from internal or external source that can bring the experience, intuition, and creativity to bear on the successful development and implementation SP in the HEI in developing countries..

## Conclusion

With the rapid changes and stiff competition occurring in today's higher education market, the success of HEIs in developing countries depends mainly on how they are able leverage strategic planning for improving quality to differentiate and strategically position themselves in the education market. Strategic planning is identified as one of the surest ways of overcoming these challenges as it creates a framework for analysing the Institution's internal and external environment, and its potential to be able to respond to the emerging trends, events, challenges, and opportunities to make them competitive.

Strategic Planning is anchored on the vision and mission of the institution and driven by the goals and values of the of the institution. It is based on the SWOT analysis of the institution as informed by the internal and external environmental scan of the institution. However, as Thompson, Strickland and Gabble (2013) [65]. have argued, an institutional strategic plan typically evolves overtime emerging from a blend of (1) proactive deliberate actions on the part of the institutional managers to improve the strategy, and (2) reactive emergent responses to unanticipated developments and fresh market conditions. This should be noted in planning and implementing institutional SPs so that the Plan can accordingly be adjusted towards the dynamic quality concept for continuous improvement.

While strategic planning can be theoretically linear, it is practically non-linear, implying that, although aspects of it are common to all types of HEIs, its application processes need to be carefully crafted to suit the given institutional environment. This also implies that, the Planners have to build-in the perspectives and needs of stakeholders of the institution with whom they must co-operate and collaborate in order to achieve institutional goals. Issues that need to be considered in strategic planning in the developing countries' HEI setting are varied but should normally and generally include academic (teaching, research and extension), institutional governance, finance, physical infrastructure, ICT, human resources, gender, inter nationalisation, institutional advancement, and recreation. Challenges of strategic planning include inadequate financing, low level of commitment or the lack of it, resistance to change and politics persist in HEIs in developing countries. However, with dedicated, management and leadership supported by committed experts planners, monitors and evaluators the needed

commitment, experience, intuition, and creativity and participation can be brought to bear to overcome the challenges in order to ensure that SPs actually drive the quality agenda of HEIs in developing countries.

## Contribution to theoretical and conceptual knowledge

The extracted data were presented in a way that added to the extant literature. In terms of contributions, this review provides a series of practical recommendations for strategic planning and implementation in HEIs with particular reference to developing countries. This is significant because it is universally acknowledged that the developing countries lag behind their advanced countries in several areas of development, including education in general and quality delivery in higher education in particular.

## Limitations of the paper

Although aspects of systematic and narrative review approaches were used it is more biased towards the narrative approach, particularly in terms of analytical synthesis. The narrative approach has its own inherent limitations. For example, narrative reviews generally are comprehensive and cover a wide range of issues within a given topic, but they do not strictly follow rules about the search for evidence. Also, the synthesis followed the narrative interpretations and not the systematic review style which is characterised by much more objectivity and rigour. Nonetheless, it is comprehensive and analytical enough to give the readers required information for understanding, appreciating and applying strategic plan in the HEIs in developing countries, which is the focus of the paper, Although frantic efforts were made to cover as much literature as possible, not all literature on the subject matter was covered since the literature search did not use all databases. Besides, only material written in English were considered since that was the only international language that the author was conversant with.

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