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Competitive Strategies and Performance of Accredited Universities in Kenya

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Abstract

Universities in Kenya, with the mandate of developing Kenya's human resource, have received increasing attention due to rising concerns regarding their competitiveness for sustained performance. These concerns have been triggered by environmental shocks such as the recent covid-19 pandemic which caused disruptions in the global market, the Russia-Ukraine conflict that affected the country's dollar liquidity and in turn causing runaway inflation, global oil price shocks, extreme weather conditions that caused drought in most of the arid and semi-arid areas, declines in real gross domestic product and severe hardship facing Kenya's government's capacity to fund university education. Against this backdrop, a conceptual model was developed whose main objective was to determine the effect of competitive strategies on performance of accredited universities in Kenya. The corresponding hypothesis stated that competitive strategies have no significant effect on the performance of accredited universities in Kenya. The implications of performance on competitive strategies were anchored on the Industrial Organization (IO) Economics theory as propounded by Mason (1939), advanced by Bain (1968) and adopted by Porter (1985). The theory was based on the structure-conduct-paradigm (SCP), which postulated that the structure of a market and/or industry impacted the "conduct" of businesses, which then impacted their performance. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design targeting a population of 53 accredited universities in Kenya was used. Primary data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires. The response rate from completed questionnaires was 66.6%. Data was analysed using multiple linear regression analysis. The findings from the analyzed data showed competitive strategies that had significant influence on performance of accredited universities in Kenya namely; market penetration, strategic alliances, focus strategy, differentiation and cost leadership, in that order. Future research could include other respondents such as staff and students to eliminate single source bias to enrich the study. Other methods such as longitudinal design could offer richer data and greatly support the research design and the outcomes.

Key words: *Competitive strategies, Competitive advantage and Performance of Accredited Universities in Kenya.*

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1.0 Introduction

Performance is a key notion in strategic management with various researchers endeavoring to explain why it varies in the same industry (Ogollah et al., 2011). Performance variances have been posited as consequences of firm and industry-specific factors, namely intra-industry structure, strategy, industry competition, resources, and managerial competencies (López-Cabarcos et al., 2015; Spanos et al., 2004).This study explored how competitive strategies impact organizational performance. Some scholars have posited there is a linear relation between competitive strategies and organization's performance (Ndung'u, 2020; Onyonyi, 2018). Ndung'u (2020) found that competitive strategies extensively predicted the manufacturing firm's performance. The same study found that corporate image capital and business-related environment significantly moderated the nexus between competitive strategies and performance of manufacturing entities. Onyonyi (2018) probed in an empirical manner the impact of competitive strategies on growth of Kenyan SMEs. The overall findings of the empirical inquiry were that all strategies were statistically significant on the growth of SMES. Previous studies have revealed inconsistent results in the direction and magnitude of the influence of strategy on performance (Munyoki & K'Obonyo, 2015; Nandakumar, Ghobadian, & O'Regan, 2011). Munyoki and K'Obonyo (2015) in a study on state corporations in Kenya established those competitive strategies had a positive but not strongly correlated to performance. A study done by Nandakumar et al., (2011) manufacturing firms in Kenya in the UK, revealed Porter's Strategy types had a weak correlation with financial performance hence, were limited in explaining the performance heterogeneity in organizations. Similarly, a study by Machuki and K'Obonyo (2011) recognized that though there existed a robust relationship between firm strategy and performance, while corporate strategic behavior did not significantly affect the success of entities listed on the NSE. Thus, the influence of competitive strategies on performance remains unresolved leaving room for other researches.

The need for competitive strategies is crucial in accredited universities in Kenya given the global environmental shocks such as the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) endemic, the Russia-Ukraine invasion that affected the country's dollar liquidity and in turn causing runaway inflation, global oil price shocks, extreme weather conditions that caused drought in most of the arid and semi-arid areas, declines in real gross domestic product, increasing demand for university education by a growing youthful population and severe hardship facing Kenya's government's capacity to fund university education (World bank,2020; World Bank Group, 2022). This has triggered the need to look for competitive strategies that would lead to better performance of accredited universities in Kenya.

1.1 Competitive strategies

Competitive strategies are described as the deliberate selection of various sets of activities that will deliver a unique mix of value over competitors or taking defensive or defensive actions so as to develop a defensible position in a sector, in order to fruitfully manage the five competitive forces and thereby, producing exceptional investment returns for the company (Porter, 1980). According to Prahalad and Hamel (1980), competitive strategies are engaged by businesses to achieve or improve performance and competitive advantage in the industry. Consequently, the goal of competitive strategies is to innovate and gain market and industry supremacy by satisfying consumers' needs and preferences, and responding to stakeholders' sensitive needs. Various approaches have been discovered to this end by different organizations. Ultimately, the paramount strategy for any organization is a unique structure reflecting its specific circumstances.

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Competitive strategies in general, exercise a great influence on firm performance (Ansoff, 1965; Spanos et al., 2004). Firms develop actions to establish a strategy for achieving competitive advantage to earning of above average returns to stakeholders (Barney, 2002:13). Diverse firms, even within the same industry, may be in need of different strategies to succeed. This is because there can exist a great difference between the abilities of a firm to succeed as there are vital inequalities among most competitors. Thus, there are many competitive strategies open to firms to give them sustainable competitive advantage for long term business success (McGee, 2015). This study proposed Porter's strategy types (1985), growth strategies by Ansoff (1965) and Strategic alliances (Dussauge & Garrette, 1995) to achieve success for accredited universities in Kenya.

Ansoff (1965) advanced a growth strategy that entailed determining the product-markets in which the business could compete along four components: growth vector, product & market scope, synergy and competitive advantage. The strategy used four areas of competencies and generic strategies namely, product development, market penetration and market development to achieve an advantage. Porter (1985) on the other hand proposed three generic typologies: cost leadership, focus, and difference to achieve competitive advantage and long-term profitability. Dussauge and Garrette, (1995) defines strategic alliances as cooperative arrangements or partnerships between two or more independent firms that would handle one or more specified projects for a set period of time in order to strengthen their competencies. They were constituted to allow partners pool resources and coordinate efforts in order to achieve results that neither could be obtained by acting alone. Strategic alliances were also defined as inter-firm cooperative arrangements that attempted to give the partners a competitive advantage (Elmuti, Abebe & Nicolosi;2005).

1.2 Organizational Performance

Short and Palmer (2003) describe organizational performance as how a successful organization seeks to achieve its vision, mission, and goals. According to Machuki and kamala (2019), it entails achieving effectiveness and efficiency in a company. Richard, Devinney, Yip and Johnson (2009) suggested that an assessment of organizational performance is an important aspect of strategic management in which managers understand that in order to make strategic changes, where necessary, they should be aware of the performance of their organizations. Also, a review of past studies demonstrated that organizational performance is a multidimensional concept that means different things to different organizations. This explains why there is variation in indicators of performance between different organizations in the economy, which tend to lead to variations in measuring performance. Indicators of performance are said to mostly rely on the main aim of the business and the justification for their presence (Richard et al., 2009).

In the recent past an increasing interest has been generated on performance measurement frameworks for university organizations with various multi-dimensional frameworks such as balance scorecard (Kaplan & Norton, 2004) and dashboard (Eckerson,2010) being applied. These have mostly originated from private sector in for-profit settings. However, few have been able to capture the nature of these organizations and they are unable to understand the complexities of university services (Wang, 2010). According to Wang (2010), university performance was to be measured based on goals to be achieved. Performance of universities was captured using comprehensive dimensions that capture key performance areas derived from functions to the extent to which each achieved university goals. Based on this argument, two dimensions were developed, namely; academic dimension and management dimension. The two dimensions were further divided into four sub-dimensions: research effectiveness, teaching effectiveness, finance and community outreach. Financial/quantitative indicators were

measured by gauging how effective universities managed financial resources to serve academic purposes as well as raise the same using indicators such as research grants, tuition fees, entrepreneurial income earnings or government funding. Non-financial/qualitative indicators were linked to outcomes from university objectives. This study adopted measures proposed by (Wang, 2010; Muraguri, 2016). According to Muraguri (2016), university performance was measured using four non-financial measures namely; teaching effectiveness, research effectiveness, and community outreach.

1.3 Accredited Universities

Universities in Kenya are categorized into two broad groups: public and private (Gok, 2012). A public university is wholly owned and subsidized by the Kenyan government whereas a private university is mostly maintained out of private funds by private investors and tuition fees from student, and, recently, funds from state funding of students in those private universities (Gok, 2017). Those universities with accreditation mean they have public acceptance and confirmation evidenced by award of a charter which a university and continues to meet standards of academic excellence set by commission. Among the standards to be met include adequate physical, human, library and financial resources, viable relevant academic programs (Universities Act,2012). In the last two decades universities have undergone dynamic growth and changes in Kenya. For instance, student numbers in public universities have increased exponentially over the years with average admission rates changing from 4% in 2009 to 7.5% in 2014 and 13.1% in the year 2020/21 (GoK, 2019). Increasing enrollments have strained the available physical infrastructure, particularly in public universities, leading to overcrowding in classrooms, a shortage of qualified staff with a staff/student ratio of 1:70, notable cases of plagiarism, declining research and administrative funding leading to compromised quality and (ir)relevance of curricula and effective education models (CUE, 2016; GoK, 2019). Under the current precarious economic conditions, where funding to universities was reduced by 26% by a government struggling to balance its budget, the private and public universities are required to find alternative innovative approaches to raise funds (KNBS, 2020). Other drawbacks have included employers' discontent with the caliber of graduates seeking employment; constant closures due to student unrest and industrial actions by staff; and lawsuits by students due to governance problems (World Bank, 2019; Kenya Law, 2019). The Ministry of Education, thus, suggested the need to prioritize expenditure, to determine suitable funding, determine the right staffing model, and the need to rationalize university education with a view to preserve and restore the credibility of universities (GoK, 2019).

On the other hand, in private universities, a policy introduced by the government in 2016 to sponsor students with university entry grades of C+ and above, attracted aggressive competition for the student market share (Kuccps News, 2016). Another challenge comprised declining funds as these are raised from private sponsorship; mostly backed by religious organizations or fees charged to their limited number of students who can afford comparatively higher fees. Furthermore, there was evidently a lack of focus in research; heightened rivalry from their counterparts in public universities offering parallel degree courses; intensified rivalry with international universities who recruit local students by way of aggressive campaigns; and offer of specialist unique programs (Oketch,2004; World Bank, 2020). Likewise, recent disruptions in the global market by COVID-19 caused all universities to suspend contact learning for nine months, which happened after the first case was reported in March 2020, upsetting the teaching and learning calendar. Only a few institutions with an online information system and technology were able to carry on (Kenyans.co.ke.March, 2020).

1.4 Research Hypothesis

Ho: Competitive strategies have no significant influence on performance of accredited universities in Kenya**.**

2.0 Literature review

To identify research gaps, the study reviewed both theoretical and empirical literature as explained

2.1 Theoretical Review

In explaining the nature and interactions of the key constructs, the study was anchored on the Industrial Organization (Economics) Theory (Mason, 1953; Bain, 1968) as the overarching theory informing the relationship between competitive strategies and the performance of accredited universities in Kenya

2.1.1 Industrial Organizational (IO) Economics Theory

The Industrial Organizational (IO) Economics theory was championed by Mason (1939), advanced by Bain (1968) and adopted by Porter (1985) based on the Structure-Conduct - Performance (SCP) paradigm. The paradigm analyzed empirically the impact of marketplace structures on the performance of the industry. The IO perspective is said to offer direct insights into how companies could attain an above-average performance based on the industry structure and the strategic approaches suitable to that structure. The SCP framework demonstrates a stable relationship having a causal and linear "one-way relationship" starting from the structure through conduct to performance with the assumption of equilibrium positions and perfect information in the industry. However, this assumption is rarely true in real market conditions (Bains, 1968). The model also states that where the market structure is extremely concentrated and is subject to a few big firms, it gives rise to less competition and higher prices and revenues. Where the structure consists of many minor companies, they yield greater competition with lower prices and revenues (Saadatmand, Dabab & Weber, 2018). On the other hand, Chang, Yu and Chen (2016), argued that there could be several response effects that are also likely: from the performance back to the conduct; from the conduct to the structure; and from the performance to the structure hence, the existence of a two-way relationship.

Porter (1985) used the SCP model to design the industry analysis model. He posited that the chief diagnostic feature of IO could be applied to find strategic approaches that companies may apply in their particular businesses. More precisely, IO offers the strategic management discipline a systematic model for assessing industry rivalry. Critics state that the model has limitations based on its assumptions: the external environment is presumed to govern strategic options of firms; resources are presumed alike for all businesses, which are said to be in the custody of comparable strategic competences leading to identical strategic activities; and decision-makers are also viewed as coherent and likely to choose similar strategic activities built on similar resources (Meilak & Tammut-bonicci, 2015).

2.2 Empirical Review of the relationship between competitive strategies and performance of accredited universities in Kenya

Competitive strategies allow an organization to deploy their resources in a given product/market area given existing threats and opportunities as well as challenges in environment vis- a-vis its competitors so as to achieve above average returns and superior performance (Porter, 1985). However, this situation occurs only when strategy fits with the organization's internal conditions and external environment (Thompson & Strickland, 1996). Several scholars in the discipline of strategic management have advanced various competitive strategies or business strategies to compete in a given industry in an extremely competitive

worldwide market (Gibkus & Kemp, 2003). Strategy is thus said to be a multidimensional concept comprising various strategies that are then matched with the environment to establish superior performance, which is a key tenet of strategic management (Bourgeois, 1985).

Several empirical studies have supported the notion that competitive strategies significantly influence organizational performance. But other studies have revealed inconsistent outcomes (Machuki & K'Obonyo, 2011; Nandakumar et al., 2011; Abonda & Machuki, 2018). Machuki and K'Obonyo (2011) explored the relationship between organizational strategic behavior and performance of publicly quoted firms locally. Overall results from this research demonstrated that there existed a noteworthy link between organizational strategy and corporate performance. However, the effects of organizational strategy on most performance metrics was statistically insignificant. The combined consequence of types of strategies on corporate performance was revealed to be lower than the sum of the independent effects of the same variables for most performance measures. A study by Nandakumar et al (2011) on generic approaches and performance of manufacturing companies in the United Kingdom showed that firms espousing any individual strategy, namely differentiation or cost leadership, realized better results than "stuck-in-the-middle" companies that lacked a clear strategic direction. Where strategies were integrated, they had poorer performance compared to cost leadership and differentiation on measures of financial performance. This observation supported claims by Porter (1985) that organizations are not likely to succeed with combination strategies. Abonda and Machuki (2018) studied the influence of competitive strategies on the performance of construction enterprises in Kisumu County. The results from the study revealed that grand strategies accounted for an outstanding variation in performance, followed by generic strategies and, finally, growth strategies. Differentiation strategy explained for a greater amount of change in performance of the organization followed by market penetration, then strategic alliances and innovation, respectively.

The relationship between competitive strategies and organizational performance appeared to offer an incomplete theory to explain how competitive advantage could be applied and sustained for superior performance. The results, therefore, revealed that there was still room for further research on this topic. It was also markedly clear that most studies had been done in organizations that were capital-intensive like large-scale manufacturing industries and in large and medium developed economies in the Americas, Asia and Europe (Spanos al., 2006; Teeratansirikool et al., 2014; Islami, Mustafa & Topuzovska Latkovikj, 2020). Very few studies had been done in the service industry such as in universities in Kenya (Soko et al., 2015). Therefore, a contextual gap would be filled by the current research.

3.0 Research Methodology

The study embraced descriptive cross-sectional survey to collect primary data and accurately assess the direct impact of competitive strategies on the performance of accredited universities in Kenya. Cross-sectional studies target either the complete population or just a portion of the population gathered to aid in answering study questions. A cross-section research design was selected since it was suitable for collecting data for many responses at once (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

Owing to the fact that the population under study was small, a census study was recommended. Saunders et al., (2023) suggest that a census study is appropriate where the population is fairly small and readily available (Appendix II provides the list of the 53 accredited/ chartered universities in Kenya.

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The key respondent from each university was the academic registrar or an equivalent, as titles varied from university to university. The registrars were chosen because they are directly involved in strategy and policy-making, and processes and procedures such as student admissions, teaching, research and promotion of academic staff.

The pilot-test on research instruments was carried out using five universities, which were not used in the final analysis. This was done for purposes of validating data collection and to enable the researcher to refine research tools.

4.0 Results

Response rate

Table 4.1: Rate of Response

Ownership	Questionnaire Distributed	Questionnaires accepted	Percent
Government owned (Public)	30	20	41.6
Privately owned	18	12	25.0
Total	**48**	**32**	**66.6**

Source: Research Data (2022)

Table 4.1 above illustrates that 41.6 % (20 out of 48) of the responses were from public or government-owned universities with 25% (12 out of 48) from the privately-owned universities, which corresponds to an overall response rate of 66.6%. The data collection tool (questionnaire) was pretested before the actual data collection process from five academic registrars that were randomly selected from five accredited universities. This process was necessary to ensure that the tool measures what it was expected to measure in this study.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics for Measures for Individual Competitive Strategies

MEASURES OF COST LEADERSHIP	N	Mean	Std. Dev	CV%
My university minimizes costs through applying innovative technology that increases operational efficiency.	32	3.78	0.87	23.01
My university outsources non-core functions to control costs.	32	3.38	1.07	31.7
My university pursues cost cutting measures through strict controls on its overhead costs.	32	3.94	0.95	24.07
My university pursues cost advantage by analyzing and rationalizing its value chain processes through bulk buying from suppliers.	32	3.56	0.88	24.64
Average mean score	**32**	**3.66**	**0.94**	**25.86**
MEASURES OF DIFFERENTIATION				
My university seeks to benchmark with other reputable universities.	32	4.16	1.02	24.51
My university emphasizes on building a strong brand name for its identification by offering unique programs.	32	4.13	0.94	22.84
My university emphasizes innovative programs as central for gaining competitive advantage.	32	3.75	1.02	27.09
Average mean score	**32**	**4.01**	**0.**	**24.81**

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MEASURES OF FOCUS				
My university offers specialist programs to a niche group of students customized to their unique requirements.	32	3.75	0.88	23.44
My university targets students ready to pay a superior price for the programs.	32	2.81	0.90	31.85
My university serves specially defined market segment.	32	2.1	1.15	3.44
My university offers low-cost, short-term courses to a select group of students.	32	2.7	1.03	34.73
Average mean score	**32**	**3.11**	**0.99**	**32.37**
MEASURES OF MARKET PENETRATION	**N**	**Mean**	**Std Dev**	**CV%**
My university has an aggressive promotion/advertising strategy for its programs to optimize student market share.	32	3.188	0.998	31.3
My university has partnered with other well-established universities in order to strengthen its resources and customer pool.	32	3.156	0.954	30.22
My university has invested heavily on online learning technology to leverage on her market share of students.	32	3.594	1.043	2.02
My university has established a centre of innovation for development of new innovative programs using modern technology.	32	3.031	1.177	38.83
Average mean score	**32**	**3.24**	**1.04**	**32.34**
MEASURES OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT				
My university seeks to position itself as the market leader by constantly reviewing programs against ISO and CUE standards in order to match public and customers demand.	32	3.969	1.121	28.24
My university hosts periodic conferences with other strategic partnerships, local or international universities or agencies to exchange knowledge, expertise and technology leading to quality programs and researches.	32	3.688	0.998	27.06
Average mean score	**32**	**3.83**	**1.06**	**27.65**
MEASURES OF MARKET DEVELOPMENT				
My university has expanded in other geographical areas (expanding regionally) through media, websites and research fairs.	32	2.88	1.10	38.26
My university explores new markets through use of internet technology (online distance learning).	32	3.28	0.6	29.20
My university conducts exchange programs with international universities to provide unique experiences to their students and staff adjuncts.	32	3.19	1.09	34.22
My university has increased enrollment of foreign students through online learning.	32	2.63	1.13	43.01
Average mean score		**2.99**	**1.07**	**36.17**

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	32			
MEASURES OF STRATEGIC ALLIANCE				
My university interacts with between my university with relevant industries to obtain opportunities to enhance skills for their students.	32	3.25	0.95	2.23
My university conducts exchange programs conducted with international universities to provide unique experiences to their students.	32	2.94	1.05	35.57
My university seeks to acquire basic research funding and knowledge through partnerships with industry enterprises.	32	3.34	1.00	30.00
Average mean score	**32**	**3.18**	**1.00**	**31.60**

Source: Research Data (2022)

Table 4.3: Summary for overall Descriptive Statistics for Competitive Strategies

Summary Descriptive statistics for competitive strategies				
	N	**Mean**	**Std**	**CV%**
Cost leadership	32	3.66	0.94	25.06
Differentiation	32	4.01	0. 99	24.81
Focus	32	3.11	0. 99	32.37
Market Penetration	32	3.24	1.04	32.34
Product development	32	3.83	1.06	27.65
Market development	32	2.99	1.07	36.17
Strategic Alliances	32	3.18	1.0	31.60
Overall average mean		**3.43**	**1.00**	**30.00**

Source: Research Data (2022)

Table 4.3 displays the summary of the means of composite scores of individual competitive strategies and the overall average mean score index for competitive strategies data. The mean score for composite score of cost leadership strategy was 3.66; SD of 0.4 and coefficient variation of 25.06%. The means score for composite score of differentiation strategy was 4.01 with a SD of 0.94 and a coefficient variation of 24.81. The means score for composite score index of focus strategy was 3.11 with a SD of 0.99 and a coefficient variation of 32.37. The means score for composite score index of market penetration was 3.24, SD of 1.04 with a CV of 32.34. The means score for composite score index of product development was 3.83, a SD of 1.06 and a coefficient of variations of 27.65. The means score index for market development was 2.99, a SD of 1.07 and a coefficient variation of 36.17; and the mean score index for

strategic alliances was 3.18, a SD of 1.0 and a coefficient variation of 31.60. While the overall means score index for composite score was 3.43, with a SD of 1.0 and CV of 30%. This signifies that the 32 academic registrars who took part in this study concurred that competitive strategies influenced the performance of accredited universities in Kenya.

Performance of Accredited Universities in Kenya

Table 4.4: Descriptive Statistics for Individual Measures of Performance of Accredited Universities in Kenya

Measures of Financial Resources	N	Mean	SD	CV-%
The tuition income per annum in my university has been increasing from increasing student enrolment.	32	3.313	1.256	37.91
Income generated from investment activities by my university has been increasing	32	2.781	1.128	40.56
The amount of research grants in my university has been increasing compared to our competitors.	32	3.063	1.19	38.85
Earnings from patents in my university have been increasing relatively more compared to those of our competitors.	32	2.406	1.043	43.35
The returns from consultancy services in my university have been increasing compared to those of our competitors.	32	2.343	0.02	38.5
Average mean score	**32**	**2.78**	**1.10**	**39.83**
Measures of Teaching Effectiveness				
My university offers market –driven programs.	32	4.16	0.68	16.29
My university has put in place infrastructure that supports quality learning such as open access initiatives and digital repositories in comparison to our competitors.	32	3.1	0.96	24.65
The number of graduating students has continued to increase in my university in comparison to those of our competitors.	32	3.81	0.97	25.31
My university complies to set standards by CUE for our programs to encourage consistency in quality and relevance.	32	4.41	0.71	16.16
My university participates in college conferences and educational events in order to enhance teaching effectiveness.	32	4.13	0.79	19.22
Academic programs are reviewed regularly in my university compared to our competitors.	32	4.03	0.78	19.40
My university lays emphasis on the use of new technology in our teaching methods.	32	3.97	0.93	23.48

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My university undertakes programs and curricula innovation by integrating information communication technology systems for e-learning.	32	3.75	0.84	22.45
My university conducts a comprehensive evaluation of all programs, services and operational units on a regular basis based on performance contracting.	32	4.00	0.76	19.05
Average mean score	**32**	**4.02**	**0.83**	**20.67**
Measures of Research Effectiveness				
Training on research for staff in our university is emphasized.	32	3.69	0.97	26.17
My university's ranking in the world webometrics ranking has been improving.	32	3.38	1.04	30.81
My university employs and retains high quality faculty and staff that optimize use of resource.	32	3.75	0.8	26.24
The number of research publications in credible journals has been increasing.	32	3.75	1.05	27.2
Average mean score	**32**	**3.64**	**1.01**	**27.79**
Measures of Community Outreach				
Our university has a policy on community outreach.	32	4.06	0.8	24.17
The number of community outreach programs has been increasing in our university.	32	3.69	1.06	28.77
Community outreach enhances our university reputation and growth	32	3.75	0.98	26.24
My university has an understanding with the community around us	32	4.00	0.84	21.05
Average mean score	**32**	**3.88**	**0.97**	**25.06**

Source: Research Data (2022).

Table 4.4 displays the highest measure in financial resources was "tuition income per annum in my university has been increasing from increasing student enrollment" whose mean value was 3.313 with a SD of 1.256 and CV of 37.1%. The second highest measure "the amount of research grants in my university has been increasing compared to our competitor's mean" with a mean of 3.063, SD of 1.10 and variability of 38.85%. The lowest score was from "the returns from consultancy services in my university have been increasing compared to those of our competitors", with a mean of 2.343 and SD of 0.902. Therefore, universities needed to undertake more of consultancy services create patents, seek research grants and other investments to generate funds for their universities.

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Teaching effectiveness was demonstrated with a high average mean value of 4.02 to capture perceptions from the academic registrar with the highest scores that stated, "My university follows guidelines provided by the CUE in Kenya" with a mean score of 4.41, SD of 0.71 and CV of 16.16%.; "My university complies to set standards by CUE for our programs to encourage consistency in quality and relevance" had a mean of 4.406, SD of 0.712 and coefficient of variation of 16.16%. Also, "my university offers market driven programs" had a mean of 4.156, SD of 0.677 and coefficient of variation of 16.29%. Further, "my university participates in college conferences and educational events in order to enhance teaching effectiveness" showed a mean of 4.125, SD of 0.793 and CV of 19.22%. In general, accredited universities have put in place measures to have effective teaching to a moderate extent and to a great extent in their institutions.

The mean scores for research effectiveness were below 4.0 but above 3.0. These included "My university employs and retains high quality faculty and staff that optimize use of resources" which had a mean of 3.750 with SD of 0.984; "The number of research publications in credible journals has been increasing" shows a mean of 3.750, with SD of 1.047. The lowest is noted in "my university's ranking in the world webometrics ranking has been improving" with a mean of 3.375 and SD of 1.040. There is evidence of increase in research effectiveness among the accredited universities in Kenya.

The perspective on community outreach with an average mean score of 3.8, with the item stating, "my university has a policy on community outreach" having a mean of 4.06; "My university has an understanding with the community around us" having a mean of 4.063 and SD of 0.8, had the highest scores. The lowest mean of 3.688 and SD of 1.061 was noted from the item, "The number of community outreach programs has been increasing in our university". Therefore, accredited universities in Kenya have moderately been engaging in community outreach activities to impact on organizational performance in accredited universities in Kenya.

4.6 Descriptive statistics for measures of performance of accredited universities in Kenya

The summary of four perspectives used to measure overall organizational performance are represented in Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5: Summary of Overall Performance of Accredited Universities in Kenya

	N	Mean	SD	CV%
Financial resources	32	2.78	1.10	39.83
Teaching Effectiveness	32	4.02	0.83	20.67
Research Effectiveness	32	3.64	1.01	27.79
Community outreach	32	3.88	0.7	25.06
Overall average		3.58	0.8	28.34

Source:Research Data (2022).

To operationalize organizational performance, four measures were adopted from previous studies by scholars such as Wang (2010); Muraguli (2016); Waithaka & Kibera (2018). Mean scores were computed from data obtained using the guided Likert scale. A summary of mean scores from statements describing organizational performance reported the lowest mean score at 2.78 in financial resources with the highest mean score being 4.02 on teaching effectiveness as a measure of performance in respective accredited universities. The overall means score was 3.58. This score reveals a score that agrees to a "moderate extent" inclining to a "large extent"

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as a pointer that the academic registrars concur that performance of accredited universities in Kenya has been improving.

4.7 Validity Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test for sampling adequacy to test content and construct validity were applied in this study (Patton, 2002). The academic registrar's instrument was pilot tested by administering it to five registrars in five universities that were randomly picked so as to ascertain if the participants could respond to the questions easily and minimum ambiguity. The tools were cleaned at the pilot testing level and validity test. This study also used factor analysis for the withdrawal of common attributes from the data that are scored commonly. The KMO and Bartlett's test results on instruments validity are presented in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6: Summary of KMO and Bartlett Test Results

		Bartlett's test of sphericity		
Variables	**KMO**	**Chi2**	**df**	**p**
Competitive strategies	0.575	354.03	253	0.000
Organizational performance	0.696	573.69	231	0.000

Source: Research Data (2022)

The outcomes of Bartlett's test indicated the adequacy of sampling for the variables. Competitive strategies had KMO=0.575, Chi-square=354.03, and $p<0.05$; Organizational performance KMO=0.696, Chi-square=573.69, and $p<0.05$. The KMO values were found to be all > 0.05 and the Bartlett's test for Sphericity scores were also found to be all less than 0.05 (significance level), indicating that variable collinearity was low in the specific variables. Thus, the instruments passed the validity test for further analysis.

4.8 Correlational Analysis

Prior to conducting linear regression, a linear relationship ought to exist between two or more predictor variables and dependent variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Linear association among predictor variables and dependent variable can be established by use of scatter plots (Hair et al., 2014) or Pearson's correlation coefficient. This study applied Pearson's product moment correlation to test for linearity. Table 4.7 show linearity scores.

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Table 4.7: Results of Linearity test

		Organizational Performance	Competitive Strategies	Competitive Advantage	Ethical values	Corporate Reputation
Organizational Performance	correlation	1				
	p					
	N	30				
Competitive Strategies	correlation	0.779**	1			
	p	0.000				
	N	30	30			
Competitive Advantage	correlation	0.529*	0.687**	1		
	p	0.001	0.000			
	N	30	30	30		
Ethical values	correlation	0.484*	0.630**	0.566**	1	
	p	0.004	0.000	0.000		
	N	30	30	30	30	
Corporate Reputation	correlation	0.727**	0.640**	0.329	0.487*	1
	p	0.000	0.000	0.065	0.004	
	N	30	30	30	30	30

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher (2022)

Table 4.7 show that the linearity scores indicated significant correlations among the variables ranging from 0.329 to 0.726. Table 4.7 shows variable correlation scores between competitive advantage and performance was 0.529, ethical values and performance was 0.484, corporate reputation and performance was 0.726, competitive advantage and corporate advantage was 0.329, ethical values and corporate reputation was 0.4876 while competitive advantage and ethical values was 0.566. All the linearity test scores are positive indicating incremental relationships. These results implied that the variables correlated well and that data was significant at P value < 0.05, although the only relation that was not significant was competitive advantage and corporate advantage was 0.329 (p>0.005). The results confirmed that most of the requirements for linearity were met.

4.9 Regression Analysis

The study sought to determine the effect of competitive strategies on performance of accredited universities in Kenya.

Objective: To determine the effect of competitive strategies on the performance of accredited universities in Kenya.

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Ho_1: Competitive Strategies have no significant influence on Performance of Accredited Universities in Kenya**.**

To test the hypothesis, a simple linear regression was used. The model for testing the hypothesis was as follows: $OP= \beta_0 + \beta X_1 + \varepsilon$

OP= Composite score of performance of accredited universities in Kenya
β_0 = constant (intercept)
β_1 = Coefficients
X_1= Composite score of competitive strategies
ε= error term.

Table 4:8: Regression Outcomes for the Effect of Competitive Strategies on Performance of Accredited Universities of Kenya.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R^2	Adj R^2	Standard Error of the Estimate (SE)
1	0.803	0.6454	0.6336	0.378

ANOVA[a]						
Model		SS	df	MS	F	P
1	Regression	7.8013	1	7.8013	54.605	0.000b
	Residual	4.2860	30	0.1429		
	Total	12.0873	31			

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	T	P
		B	SE	B		
1	(Constant)	1.432	0.306		4.674	0.000
	Competitive strategies (CS)	0.673	0.091	0.803	7.389	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Competitive Strategies, (CA)
b. Outcome: Variable: Performance of Accredited Universities of Kenya.
Source Research findings (2022)

Table 4.8 shows regression of the performance of accredited universities in Kenya (P) on competitive strategies (CS) yielded a model with a reasonable fit to the data as evidenced by the R^2 value of 0.6454; and R^2 indicates that 64.54% of the variance in performance was attributed to the variation in competitive strategies. Competitive strategies had a substantial impact on performance as indicated by the significant F-value of 54.605. The results in table 4.8 further show that Beta coefficient (β=0.803, t=7.389, P<0.05) suggesting that performance varies by 0.803 for a unit change in competitive strategies. The constant term of 1.432 represented the expected value of organizational performance when competitive strategies are zero. Basing on outcomes, the null hypothesis (Ho_1) which stated that "Competitive Strategies have no significant influence on performance of accredited universities in Kenya" was rejected. The analysis suggested that competitive strategies are statistically significant predictors of the performance of accredited universities in Kenya.

This study also tested hypotheses on individual competitive strategies, namely, cost leadership, differentiation, focus, market penetration, product development, market development and strategic alliances.

(ii) The models for testing individual competitive strategies

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(a)Ho_1a Cost leadership has no significant effect on performance of accredited universities in Kenya

$OP=\beta_0+\beta_2 CL+\varepsilon$
CS=Cost Leadership
β_{01}, β_1 = coefficients
ε =error term.

Table 4.9: Regression Outcomes for the effect of Cost Leadership Strategy on Performance of Accredited Universities in Kenya.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R^2	Adj R^2	SE
1	0.4893	0.2349	0.2141	0.5536

ANOVAa						
Model		SS	df	MS	F	P
1	Regression	2.8942	1	2.894	9.445	.004
	Residual	9.131	30	0.306		
	Total	12.0873	31			

Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	T	p
	B	SE	B		
(Constant)	2.299	0.448		5.136	0.000
CL	0.375	0.122	.803	3.073	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Competitive Strategies, (CA)
b. Outcome: Variable: Performance of Accredited Universities of Kenya.
Source: Researcher findings (2022).

Table 4.9 shows the regression of performance on cost leadership strategies (CL). As depicted in the table, the R^2 is substantial (R^2 = 0.2394, F = 9.445, P<0.05). The results show that the analytical model attained goodness of fit. They also suggest that 23.94% of variation in performance is described by cost leadership strategy, while the remainder of 76.06 % is due to factors outside the scope of this study. The unstandardized coefficient of cost leadership was strong and significant, and was manifested by the t table (Beta = 0.673, t=3.073, P<0.05) indicating that for an increase for each one-unit in cost leadership strategies, performance in accredited universities in Kenya was expected to increase by 0.673 units. Therefore, following the results, the null hypothesis (Ho_1a) detailed that cost leadership has insignificant effect on performance was rejected. The analysis suggested that cost leadership strategies are statistically significant predictors of the performance of accredited universities in Kenya.

The linear regression expression for the cost leadership strategies and performance of accredited universities in Kenya was:

$OP = 2.299 + 0.375Cl + 0.1221\varepsilon$; Where OP is the Performance of Accredited Universities Kenya;
CL *is* the Cost leadership strategies andε is the error term.

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(b)Ho_{1b}: Differentiation Strategy has no significant influence on performance of accredited universities in Kenya

$OP=\beta_0+\beta_2 DS+\varepsilon$
DS=Composite score of Differentiation Strategy
a. Predictors: (Constant) Differentiation strategy
b. Outcome Variable: Performance of Accredited Universities in Kenya
$\beta_{01}, \beta_1 =$ coefficients

Table 4.10: Regression Outcomes for the effect of Differentiation Strategy on Performance of Accredited Universities of Kenya

Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adj R^2	SE
1	0.500	0.250	0.225	0.550

ANOVAa

Model		SS	df	MS	F	P
1	Regression	3.024	1	3.024	10.01	.004
	Residual	9.063	30	0.302		
	Total	12.0872	31			

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	T	p
		B	SE	B		
1	(Constant)	2.144	0.483		4.438	0.000
	DS	0.3617	0.114	0.500	3.164	0.004

Table 4.10 illustrate a positive connection between differentiation strategy and performance of accredited universities of Kenya was shown by the outcomes (R=0.250). A coefficient of determination R^2 was low but significant. As depicted in Table 4.17, the results suggest that 25% of the performance variation is explained by a differentiation strategy, while the remainder of 75% is due to factors outside the scope of this study. A $\beta = 0.3617$, $t=3.164$, $P<0.05$ with F-statistics of 10.009 indicate that for every one-unit increase in differentiation strategies, the performance was expected to increase by 0.3617 units. The overall model was significant, indicating that the analytical model achieved goodness of fit. The constant term of 2.144 represented the expected value of performance when differentiation strategies are zero. Thus, in this study differentiation significantly influenced the performance of accredited universities in Kenya. Based on the foregoing, the null hypothesis (Ho_1), which stated that differentiation strategy has no significant influence on performance of accredited universities in Kenya was rejected.

The linear regression expression for the differentiation and organization performance was fitted as follows:
$OP= 2.144 + 0.3617DS + 0.114\varepsilon$,
DS is the differentiation strategy

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ε is the error term.

(c)Ho1C Focus Strategy has no significant influence on performance of accredited universities in Kenya

$OP = \beta_{01} + \beta_1 FS + \varepsilon$
FS=Composite score of Focus strategy items;
β_{01}, β_1 = coefficients
ε =error term

Table 4.11: Regression Outcomes for the Influence of Focus Strategy on Performance of Accredited Universities in Kenya

Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adj R^2	SE
1	0.578	0.334	0.312	0.518

ANOVAa

Model		SS	df	MS	F	p
1	Regression	4.0360	1	4.0360	15.04	.000
	Residual	8.0513	30	0.268		
	Total	12.087	31			

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	T	p
		B	SE	B		
1	(Constant)	2.52	0.301		8.30	.000
	FS	0.389	0.100	0.578	3.878	.001

a.Predictors: (Constant), Competitive Strategies, (CA)
b. Outcome: Variable: Performance of Accredited Universities of Kenya
Source: Research findings (2022)

The results of the test analysis displayed in Table 4.11 found a strong and positive association between focus strategy and performance as was demonstrated by correlation R=0.5778. A coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.333, F = 15.04, p < 0.05$) indicated that focus strategy explained 33.4 % of performance variation. The overall model was significant (F=15.04, p<0.05, df1=1 and df2=30) indicating that the model is a good fit. As indicated in the table 4.18 for the data, a unit increase in focus strategy increased the organization performance by 0.389 units. Thus, building on these outcomes, the null hypothesis (**Ho1c**) which stated that focus strategy had insignificant influence on the performance of accredited universities in Kenya was rejected. The linear regression expression for the focus strategy and organization performance was presented below as follows:

$$OP = 2.52 + 0.389FS + 0.1004\varepsilon,$$

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Overall, each of the three strategies by Porter (1985) had a strong and significant effect on the performance of accredited universities in Kenya with focus strategy leading followed by differentiation strategy then cost leadership strategy.

(d)Ho_{1d}: Product development has no significant influence on performance of accredited universities in Kenya

$OP= \beta_{01}+\beta_1 PD+ \varepsilon$
PD=Product Development
$\beta_{01}, \beta_1 =$ coefficients
ε =error term;

Table 4.12: Regression Outcomes for the effect of Product development Strategy on Performance of Accredited Universities in Kenya.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R^2	Adj R^2	SE
1	.695	.483	.4656	.4565

ANOVAa						
Model		SS	df	MS	F	P
1	Regression	5.837	1	5.837	28.012	.000
	Residual	6.2507	30	0.2084		
	Total	12.087	31			

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	T	P
		B	SE	B		
1	(Constant)	1.934	0.333		5.811	.000
	PD	0.446	0.084	0.694	5.293	.000

a.Predictors: (Constant), Competitive Strategies, (CA)
b.Outcome: Variable: Performance of Accredited Universities of Kenya.
Source: Research Findings (2022).

(e)Ho_{1e}: Market Penetration has significant influence on performance of universities in Kenya

$OP= \beta_{01}+\beta_1 MP+ \varepsilon$
MP=Market Penetration
$\beta_{01}, \beta_1 =$ coefficients
ε =error term.

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Table 4.13: Regression Outcomes for the effect of Market Penetration Strategy on Performance of Accredited Universities in Kenya

Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adj R^2	SE
1	.805	.648	.636	.3765

ANOVAa

Model		SS	df	MS	F	P
1	Regression	7.834	1	7.834	55.26	.000
	Residual	4.253	30	.1418		
	Total	12.087	31			

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	T	p
		B	SE	B		
1	(Constant)	1.715	.268		6.411	.000
	MP	.594	.080	.805	7.434	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Competitive Strategies, (CA)
b. Outcome: Variable: Performance of Accredited Universities of Kenya.
Source: Research Findings (2022).

Table 4.13 shows a robust and positive connection between market penetration and the performance of accredited universities in Kenya (R=0.805). A coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.648$) indicated that market penetration strategy explained 64.81% of the variation in performance while 35.19 was due to factors that were not part of the study. As seen in the table, a unit increase in market penetration (β=0.54, $p<0.05$, t-value=7.434, F=55.26) increased performance by 0.54 units. Thus, the null hypothesis Ho_1e was rejected and based on the above findings a linear regression for the market penetration and performance of accredited universities in Kenya is represented as follows:

$OP = 1.715 + 0.54MP + 0.080\varepsilon$, Where
OP is the organizational performance and
MP, is the market penetration strategy.

(f)Hof: Market development strategy has no significant influence on performance of universities in Kenya.

$OP = \beta_0 + \beta 1MD + \varepsilon$
MD=Market development
β_{01}, β_1 = coefficients
ε =error term

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Table 4.14: Regression Outcomes for the influence of Market Development Strategy on Performance of Accredited Universities of Kenya

Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adj R^2	SE
1	**.0.627**	.335	.373	.4943

ANOVAa

Model		SS	df	MS	F	P
1	Regression	4.756	1	4.756	19.462	.000
	Residual	7.331	30	.244		
	Total	12.087	31			

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	T	p
		B	SE	B		
1	(Constant)	2.27	.321		7.101	.000
	MP	.455	.103	.627	4.412	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Competitive Strategies, (CA)
b. Outcome: Variable: Performance of Accredited Universities of Kenya.
Source: Research findings (2022).

The results of the test analysis shown in Table 4.14 implies a moderate and positive association between market development strategy and organizational performance (R=0.627). A coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.3935, F = 19.462, P < 0.05$) indicates that market development explained 39.35% of performance variances of accredited universities in Kenya. The overall model was significant (F=30.03, p<0.05, df1=1 and df2=30), which indicates that the model was a good fit for the data. A unit increase in market development (β=0.455, p=0.000<0.05, t-value=4.412, Standard error=0.103) increased performance in accredited universities in Kenya by 0.455 units. Based on these outcomes, the null hypothesis Ho_1f was rejected. The linear regression expression for the market development strategy and performance of accredited universities was presented as follows below:
$OP = 2.275 + 0.455MD \quad + 0.103\varepsilon$ Where,
OP is the organizational performance
MD, the market development.

(g)Hog: Strategic Alliances has no influence on performance of universities in Kenya.

$OP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SA + \varepsilon$
SA=Strategic Alliance
β_{01}, β_1 = coefficients
ε =error.

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Table 4.15: Regression Outcomes for the influence of Strategic Alliance on Performance of Accredited Universities of Kenya

Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adj R^2	SE
1	0.7072	0.5002	0.4836	0.4487

ANOVAa

Model		SS	df	MS	F	P
1	Regression	6.0466	1	6.0466	30.30	0.000
	Residual	6.041	30	0.2014		
	Total	12.087	31			

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	T	Sig.
		B	SE	B		
1	(Constant)	2.0246	0.306		6.625	0.000
	SA	0.5091	0.093	0.7072	5.4799	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Competitive Strategies, (CA)
b. Outcome: Variable: Performance of Accredited Universities of Kenya.
Source: Research findings (2022).

The results in Table 4.15 display a robust and positive nexus between strategic alliances and Performance of accredited universities in Kenya (R=0.7072, F=30.3, t=value=5.480, p<0.05). A coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.5002$) indicates that strategic alliances explained 50.0% of the disparity in the performance of accredited universities in Kenya while the rest (50.0%) was explained by other factors separate from this study. The overall model was significant (β=2.0246, F=30.03, p<0.05, d f1=1 df2=30), which indicates that the model was a good fit. A unit increase in strategic alliances (β=2.0246, p<0.05, t-value=5.480, Standard error=0.02) increased performance by 0.509 units. Therefore, based on the foregoing, the null hypothesis Ho_1 was rejected. The linear regression expression for the strategic alliances and organization performance was as follows below:

$OP = 2.0246 + 0.509SA + 0.0929\varepsilon$ Where,

OP = Performance of Accredited Universities in Kenya,

SA = Strategic Alliances.

5.0 Discussions

The relationship between competitive strategies and the performance of accredited universities in Kenya was found to be statistically significant in this study. The research was anchored on IO (Economics) theory basing on the S-C-P framework. The chief feature of the IO model for assessing industry rivalry was strategic approaches for confronting turbulence in the environment in order to achieve superior performance. This study confirmed that when accredited universities adopted certain competitive strategies, they actually attained better performance. Ling, Ibbs and Cuervo (2005) argued that the embracing of inappropriate strategies may cause low profitability, productivity and efficiency, and financial losses among other effects. Thus, this study, showed cumulative support to the assumptions made by the anchor theory, namely IO (Economics) theory, by explaining the impact of the external environment.

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Among the competitive strategy approaches that were found to be more strongly correlated to the performance of accredited universities in Kenya were market penetration with a coefficient of correlation R^2= 63.6%, which was manifested by indicators such as application of aggressive promotion strategies for university programs in order to optimize student market share, encouraging partnerships with other well-established universities to strengthen resources and customer pool, investing for development of new innovative programs using modern technology, relying heavily on online learning technology to leverage student market share and setting up of innovation hubs. Of these indicators, investment in online learning technology to leverage student market share had the highest score while setting up of centers of innovation for developing innovative programs had the lowest score. This is because a majority of the universities face challenges related to financial resources.

The next strategy was strategic alliances (R^2=50%) whose indicators were that universities make effort to interact with relevant industries for building skills, conduct exchange programs with international universities and industry and seek to acquire basic research funding and partnerships with industry enterprises, with last indicator showing the greatest score and conduct of exchange programs having the least score. Most universities have not invested much in exchange programs to have much impact.

After strategic alliances was product development with a variation of 48.2%. It was expressed through universities seeking to position themselves as market leaders, in their program offerings in line with CUE regulations and hosting periodic conferences to exchange knowledge, expertise and technology to engineer quality programs and researches and target enrollment of foreign students. The latter showed a greater score. After the growth strategies were Porter's typologies (1985), starting with focus strategy (R^2 =33.4%) manifested through indicators such as offering of specialist programs to a niche group of students, setting of premium price offerings on programs, targeting specially defined markets. Among these indicators, offering specialist programs to unique group of students had the highest score.

Next was differentiation strategy (R^2= 25%), manifested by way of the universities seeking to benchmark with other reputable universities, building of strong brand names by identification of unique programs and offering of low-cost and short-term courses to select groups of students. Of these indicators, seeking to benchmark with reputable universities had the highest score while emphasis on innovative programs for gaining competitive advantage had the least score. Finally, cost leadership strategy (R^2 =23. %) was at the tail end of the indicators and was manifested by universities seeking to minimize costs through application of innovative technology to increase operational efficiency, outsourcing of non-core functions to control cost, and pursuing of cost advantage by rationalizing value chain processes through bulk buying from suppliers. Of these indicators, pursuit of cost-cutting measures had the greatest score while outsourcing non-core functions to control cost had the least score. Overall, the researcher submits that competitive strategies had a positive influence on the performance of accredited of Kenya.

6.0 Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The first objective of the research aimed at establishing the influence of competitive strategies on the performance of accredited universities in Kenya. The corresponding null hypothesis stated that competitive strategies do not have a significant influence on the performance of accredited universities in Kenya. To facilitate testing this hypothesis, composite scores were computed and used for the seven components of competitive strategies and the four indicators of performance. This allowed the use of competitive strategy and performance as single variables. The null hypothesis was rejected because the influence of competitive strategies on the performance of accredited universities in Kenya confirmed a significant effect of specific

predictor variables presented in the statements of hypotheses on the performance of accredited universities in Kenya. Thus, it was concluded that competitive strategies have a positive and significant and positive influence on performance of accredited universities in Kenya. Managers of universities, therefore, need to pursue competitive strategies in terms of courses offered that would enable them attain competitive advantage and success.

Researches with comparable results like those in the current study, suggesting that competitive strategies can spur performance of an organization includes, Ndung'u (2020), who established competitive strategies had a significant influence on the performance of manufacturing firms in Kenya. Likewise, research by Ekeagbara, Ogunnaike, Ibidunni and Simon-Ilogho (2019) found that competitive strategies gave institutions of higher education competitive advantage leading to their sustainability in the market. Conversely, other scholarly studies found contrary results. Nathan, Ande and Nyahas (2021) established competitive strategies correlated positively but not in a statistically significant way with performance. Also, Munyoki & K'Obonyo (2015) established those competitive strategies had a positive effect but was not strongly correlated to performance in manufacturing firms in NSE, Nigeria. The results on the strategy-performance relationship concept from research mentioned above revealed variations of how strong or weak competitive strategies impacted performance. This could be explained by a lack of unanimity on measures of competitive strategies and performance, research methodologies and theoretical approaches in each research (Oyewobi et al., 2015). In addition, these findings confirm the IO (economics) theory postulation that competitive strategies influence performance.

The influence of individual dimensions of competitive strategies on the performance of accredited universities in Kenya was also tested with respect to the subsequent strategies: cost leadership, differentiation, focus, product development, market penetration, market development and strategic alliance. These were evaluated against organizational performance. Out of these findings, Ansoff's growth strategies were found to have a strong and positive relationship between competitive strategies and the performance of accredited universities in Kenya, with market penetration leading, followed by strategic alliance, Product development and Market development strategy. Then, among Porter's strategies, focus strategy was leading, followed by differentiation and cost leadership strategy, in that order.

6.1 Limitations of the Study

The research was conducted in Kenya, an emerging lower middle-income economy, struggling with public debt issues, which has adversely affected the performance of accredited universities in Kenya. Generalizability of research outcomes to universities in other countries may be impossible due to contextual dissimilarities. Thus, in future, further research could be conducted by obtaining data from other universities even those operating with letters of interim authority.

This study was a cross-sectional survey that collected data at one point in time. Thus, the findings were limited to that point, which restricted the researcher from obtaining realistic results devoid of bias. However, due to the cross-sectional approach embraced in the research, it was difficult to establish and make causal statements about the hypothesized relationships between the variables. Consequently, other methods such as longitudinal could be considered to offer sufficient data and greatly support the research design and the outcomes. Additionally, reliance on a single respondent per university may have resulted in a skewed or overstated view of the study variables. This may have made the study results biased. Thus, future studies may consider including other informants such as teaching staff or students to enrich findings

6.6 Suggestions for the Further Research

Future studies could also be carried out while focusing on either public or private accredited universities to carry out comparative studies because they are differently structured and governed, which could enrich extant literature. This study collected primary data using questionnaire via self-reporting technique, thus relying on the information shared by participants. In some instances, the technique has been claimed to lead to validity issues. Therefore, to eliminate a single-source bias as well as subjectivity, more respondents such as students and staff could be included in future studies.

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