



Effect of Hierarchy Culture Practices on Institutional Positioning of Public Universities in The Rift Valley Region, Kenya

Janet Jepchumba Lagat, Simon Kipchumba & Symon Kiprop

ISSN: 2616-8472

Effect of Hierarchy Culture Practices on Institutional Positioning of Public Universities in The Rift Valley Region, Kenya

^{1*}Janet Jephumba Lagat, ²Simon Kipchumba & ³Symon Kiprop

¹Department of Commerce, School of Business and Economics, Kabarak University, Nakuru, Kenya; *janetlagat@kabarak.ac.ke

²Department of Commerce, School of Business and Economics, Kabarak University, Nakuru, Kenya; simonkipchumba@kabarak.ac.ke

³Department of Economics, Egerton University, Nakuru, Kenya; sikiprop@kabarak.ac.ke

How to cite this article: Lagat, J. J., Kipchumba, S., & Kiprop, S. (2026). Effect of Hierarchy Culture Practices on Institutional Positioning of Public Universities in The Rift Valley Region, Kenya. *Journal of Strategic Management*, 10 (6), 84-96. <https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t5464>

Abstract

Public universities in Kenya operate in an increasingly competitive and dynamic higher education environment characterized by declining government funding, heightened regulatory oversight, changing stakeholder expectations, and increased competition for students, research funding, and strategic partnerships. In this context, strengthening institutional positioning has become a strategic priority. Hierarchy culture, which emphasizes formal structures, standardized procedures, accountability, and coordinated decision-making, is considered an important organizational mechanism for enhancing institutional effectiveness. The study was guided by Johnson's Cultural Web Theory and adopted an ex post facto research design using a quantitative approach. Data were collected from 273 academic and non-academic staff drawn from six public universities selected through stratified random sampling from a target population of 7,427 employees. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation analysis, and simple linear regression. The findings revealed that hierarchy culture was a statistically significant predictor of institutional positioning ($\beta = .610$, $B = .616$, $t = 12.668$, $p < .001$). The regression model explained 37.2% of the variation in institutional positioning ($R^2 = .372$; $F(1, 271) = 160.477$, $p < .001$), indicating meaningful explanatory power in the study context. The results offer practical insights for university managers and policymakers seeking to strengthen governance systems and improve institutional competitiveness in Kenya's higher education sector. University councils and management should strengthen hierarchy culture practices by continuously reviewing and improving organizational structures, reporting relationships, institutional policies, and standard operating procedures with the aim of enhancing accountability, coordination, and operational efficiency. The Commission for University Education and other higher education regulators should continue to support governance frameworks that promote accountability, transparency, and institutional effectiveness while providing universities with sufficient flexibility to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges within the higher education sector.

Keywords: *Hierarchy culture; Institutional positioning; Organizational culture; Public universities; Strategic management*

1.0 Introduction

Public universities contribute substantially in national development through teaching, research, innovation, knowledge generation, and the production of skilled human capital. In Kenya, these institutions operate in an increasingly demanding environment characterized by changing stakeholder expectations, financial pressures, technological developments, regulatory requirements, and competition for students, staff, research funding, and strategic partnerships. Together, these conditions have made institutional positioning an important concern for university management as institutions seek to establish distinctive identities, maintain strong reputations, demonstrate competitiveness, and sustain stakeholder confidence.

Institutional positioning describes the degree to which a university develops a distinctive image, competitive advantage, and favourable reputation within the higher education sector. In this study, institutional positioning is reflected in academic reputation, graduate competitiveness in the labour market, ability to attract high-quality students, competitiveness relative to other public universities, brand image, employer preference for graduates, strategic identity, and national and international ranking. The descriptive analysis indicated that these dimensions are relevant to how respondents perceive the positioning of public universities in the Rift Valley Region of Kenya.

Organizational culture is an important internal factor that can shape how institutions respond to their operating environments and pursue strategic objectives. Within public universities, culture is expressed through established structures, policies, routines, authority relationships, and control mechanisms that guide everyday institutional activities. One relevant cultural orientation is hierarchy culture, which emphasizes formal rules, clearly defined responsibilities, stability, established procedures, and regulatory compliance. These characteristics are important in public universities because institutional operations are subject to formal governance structures, quality assurance requirements, and regulatory oversight.

Johnson's Cultural Web Theory helps explain of how these organizational practices become embedded in institutional behaviour. The theory conceptualizes organizational culture through interconnected elements that include organizational structures, control systems, routines and rituals, stories, symbols, and power structures (Johnson & Scholes, 1992; Johnson et al., 2008). Organizational structures and control systems are particularly relevant to hierarchy culture because they establish authority relationships, define responsibilities, guide decision-making, and regulate institutional behaviour. When these cultural elements are embedded consistently in university operations, they can promote stability, coordination, accountability, and consistency in the implementation of institutional strategies.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Previous empirical studies have linked hierarchy-oriented practices with organizational effectiveness, strategy implementation, employee commitment, and institutional management. For example, studies reviewed in the present research indicate that formal governance systems, clearly established procedures, and hierarchical structures can strengthen organizational coordination and accountability. However, much of the existing research has focused on organizational performance and related outcomes rather than institutional positioning. The literature also reveals limited empirical evidence on how individual dimensions of

organizational culture influence the positioning of public universities, including within the Rift Valley Region of Kenya.

This knowledge gap matters because public universities operate within a highly structured institutional environment in which formal procedures and accountability mechanisms may influence not only internal operations but also how institutions are perceived and positioned among stakeholders. Although hierarchy culture may provide stability and consistency, its contribution to institutional positioning requires empirical examination. Specifically, the analysis examined whether clear authority relationships, established procedures, and regulatory compliance were associated with stronger institutional positioning in Kenyan public universities. The present study therefore examined hierarchy culture practices and institutional positioning among public universities in the Rift Valley Region of Kenya.

1.2 Research Objective

To evaluate the effect of hierarchy culture practices on the institutional positioning of public universities in the Rift Valley Region, Kenya.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

H₀: Hierarchy culture practices have no statistically significant effect on the institutional positioning of public universities in the Rift Valley Region, Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Johnson's Cultural Web Theory, introduced by Johnson and Scholes (1992) and further elaborated by Johnson et al. (2008). The theory explains organizational culture through six interconnected elements: stories, symbols, routines and rituals, organizational structures, control systems, and power structures. These elements represent the visible and underlying patterns through which organizational members understand their institution, behave within it, and respond to organizational priorities. The framework suggests that organizational culture is embedded in everyday practices and structures and can therefore influence the implementation of organizational strategies. Johnson's Cultural Web Theory is relevant to this study because several of its elements correspond directly with the practices used to measure hierarchy culture. Organizational structures and power structures provide the basis for understanding clear chains of command and authority relationships, while control systems and routines help explain formal policies, established procedures, regulatory compliance, and standardized decision-making. In public universities, these structures provide employees with defined responsibilities and establish mechanisms through which institutional activities are coordinated and monitored.

The theory therefore provides a basis for explaining how hierarchy culture practices may be associated with institutional positioning. Where organizational structures, control systems, and routines are clearly established and consistently applied, universities may achieve greater stability, accountability, coordination, and consistency in their operations. These characteristics may support institutional reputation, strategic identity, competitiveness, graduate outcomes, and stakeholder confidence, which are reflected in the institutional positioning measures used in this study. Johnson's Cultural Web Theory was selected because it provides a direct theoretical explanation of how internal organizational practices can shape strategic organizational outcomes. Instead of treating hierarchy culture simply as a set of formal

rules, the theory recognizes that structures, control systems, routines, and power relationships become part of the organizational culture through repeated institutional practices. This makes the theory useful for explaining the expected relationship between hierarchy culture practices and the institutional positioning of public universities.

Johnson's Cultural Web Theory provides the theoretical basis for linking hierarchy culture practices to institutional positioning. In this study, hierarchy culture practices formed the independent variable and were represented by clearly defined rules and procedures, formal policies guiding employee behaviour, a clear chain of command, emphasis on stability and order, established decision-making procedures, and compliance with institutional regulations. These indicators correspond closely with the organizational structures, control systems, routines, and power structures identified in the Cultural Web.

The theory suggests that organizational structures establish how responsibilities and authority are distributed, while control systems and routines influence how organizational activities are performed and monitored (Johnson & Scholes, 1992; Johnson et al., 2008). In public universities, clearly defined structures and procedures may promote stability, coordination, accountability, and consistency. These characteristics may support the institution's ability to implement strategies, maintain academic and administrative standards, and respond consistently to stakeholder expectations.

Institutional positioning formed the dependent variable and was reflected in the university's academic reputation, graduate competitiveness, ability to attract high-quality students, competitiveness relative to other public universities, brand image, employer preference for graduates, strategic identity, and national and international ranking. The theoretical argument is that effective hierarchy culture practices create an organized and predictable institutional environment that supports these positioning outcomes. Stronger hierarchy culture practices were hypothesized to provide a stable organizational foundation through which universities can implement their strategies consistently, maintain institutional standards, and build stakeholder confidence. The study accordingly hypothesized that hierarchy culture practices have a significant effect on institutional positioning.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Existing empirical evidence suggests that hierarchy culture is positively associated to organizational outcomes within higher education institutions. Demissie and Egziabher (2022) found that hierarchy-oriented organizational cultures were associated with greater institutional effectiveness in Ethiopian public universities through enhanced coordination, policy implementation, and administrative control. Similarly, Al-Shamali et al. (2022) reported that effective governance systems strengthened organizational effectiveness in higher education institutions by improving accountability and operational efficiency. Within the Kenyan context, Nderitu et al. (2021) established that hierarchy culture was positively associated with strategy implementation among private chartered universities by promoting clearly defined organizational procedures and accountability mechanisms. Ngao (2023) further reported that hierarchy culture was associated with stronger employee commitment through formal governance structures and organizational stability.

An additional analytical consideration concerns the potential tension between stability and responsiveness. Formal rules can promote consistency, clear accountability, and compliance, but an excessive emphasis on rigid procedures may limit institutional flexibility. The Cultural

Web framework conceptualizes established routines and control systems as features that shape recurring organizational behaviour (Johnson et al., 2008). Accordingly, the empirical question is not whether hierarchy is universally beneficial, but whether the measured hierarchy practices correspond with stronger institutional positioning in the universities studied. The present quantitative analysis contributes to this question by isolating hierarchy culture and examining its reported relationship with a defined positioning measure.

The institutional context also warrants consideration. Kenyan public universities operate within regulatory and quality-assurance systems while competing for students, institutional partnerships, and professional recognition. The Commission for University Education (2022) documented the national policy context within which these institutions function. At the same time, research on organizational culture and university strategy has emphasized the contribution of formal processes and established authority structures (Nderitu et al., 2021; Ngao, 2023). Taken together, these perspectives justify testing whether hierarchy culture has an observable association with positioning outcomes rather than assuming that administrative stability necessarily produces competitive advantage.

The reviewed literature also indicates the importance of separating internal institutional effectiveness from external institutional positioning. Governance studies commonly assess whether organizational rules, coordination mechanisms, and administrative procedures support operational objectives. Institutional positioning, however, concerns stakeholders' perceptions of reputation, distinctiveness, graduate outcomes, and competitive standing. Johnson and Scholes (1992) and Johnson et al. (2008) provide a conceptual basis for examining how structures and control systems might connect these internal processes with externally visible institutional outcomes. This distinction is important because well-defined procedures do not automatically translate into a stronger academic identity or a more favourable market position.

Despite these findings, existing studies have primarily examined hierarchy culture in relation to organizational performance, employee commitment, institutional effectiveness, or strategy implementation. Limited empirical evidence has specifically investigated its influence on institutional positioning, particularly among Kenyan public universities. In addition, previous Kenyan studies have largely examined organizational culture as a multidimensional construct rather than isolating the contribution of hierarchy culture practices. These conceptual, contextual, and empirical gaps motivated for the present study, which examined the effect of hierarchy culture practices on the institutional positioning of public universities in the Rift Valley Region of Kenya.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study adopted an ex post facto research design within a quantitative research approach to investigate the association of hierarchy culture practices on the institutional positioning of public universities in the Rift Valley Region of Kenya. The ex post facto design was considered appropriate because the study investigated naturally occurring organizational conditions that had already been established and could not be manipulated by the researcher. Hierarchy culture practices constitute existing organizational characteristics embedded within university systems, while institutional positioning represents an existing organizational outcome shaped by internal governance and management processes. Experimental manipulation of the institutional conditions under study was neither feasible nor appropriate. Consequently, the design allowed the researchers to examine the relationship between hierarchy culture practices and institutional positioning under real organizational conditions while preserving the natural institutional environment (Saleh & Kowalczyk, 2022).

The study was conducted in six chartered public universities located in the Rift Valley Region of Kenya, namely Egerton University, Laikipia University, Maasai Mara University, Moi University, the University of Eldoret, and the University of Kabianga. The Rift Valley Region was purposively selected because it hosts a relatively high concentration of public universities that differ in institutional age, size, governance structures, academic orientation, and historical development. These institutional differences provided an appropriate context for examining variations in hierarchy culture practices and their association with institutional positioning. Furthermore, all the universities operate under the common regulatory framework of the Commission for University Education (CUE), providing a shared national regulatory context for examining the participating institutions. Nevertheless, because organizational culture is influenced by institutional and regional contexts, the findings should be interpreted with caution when generalising to public universities in other regions or to private universities operating under different governance and competitive environments.

The target population comprised 7,427 academic and non-academic staff drawn from the six public universities. Academic staff were included because they are responsible for teaching, research, innovation, and community engagement, while non-academic staff contribute to institutional governance, administration, and support services. Together, these categories of employees were considered sufficiently familiar of the organizational practices and governance systems that shape institutional culture and strategic positioning.

A sample size of 380 respondents was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed whereby the six public universities were purposively selected, respondents were stratified according to university and staff category (academic and non-academic), and proportionate allocation followed by simple random sampling was used to select participants from each stratum. This procedure supported proportional representation and random selection within each defined stratum while maintaining proportional representation across the participating universities. Of the 380 questionnaires distributed, 273 were correctly completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 71.8%, which was considered adequate for statistical analysis.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed from the study objective, Johnson's Cultural Web Theory, and the Competing Values Framework. The instrument contained items measuring hierarchy culture practices and institutional positioning using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Prior to the main survey, the questionnaire was piloted among staff at Kenyatta University, who were excluded from the main study. Content validity was established through expert review by specialists in organizational behaviour and research methodology, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The hierarchy culture scale exceeded the commonly applied internal-consistency threshold of .70, and the overall questionnaire attained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83, indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019).

The completed questionnaires were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29. Descriptive statistics comprising frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarise respondents' perceptions of hierarchy

culture practices and institutional positioning. Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was performed to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between hierarchy culture practices and institutional positioning. The study hypothesis was tested using simple linear regression analysis, with hierarchy culture practices specified as the independent variable and institutional positioning as the dependent variable. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 5% level ($p < .05$). Prior to regression analysis, the assumptions underlying linear regression were examined. Linearity was assessed using scatterplots, normality of residuals was evaluated through normal probability plots and standardised residuals, homoscedasticity was assessed by examining plots of standardised residuals against predicted values, and the independence of errors was assessed using the Durbin–Watson statistic. Since the regression model contained only one independent variable, multicollinearity was not assessed because this assumption is applicable only to models containing two or more predictor variables.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Kabarak University Research Ethics Committee (KUREC), after which a research permit was granted by the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Permission to conduct the study was also obtained from the management of the participating universities. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents before data collection. Respondents were assured that their responses would remain confidential, and that no personal identifiers would be collected. The data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. Throughout the study, the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, beneficence, justice, and academic integrity were observed.

4.0 Results

The study examined the relationship of hierarchy culture practices on the institutional positioning of public universities in the Rift Valley Region of Kenya. The findings are presented using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation analysis, regression diagnostic tests, and simple linear regression analysis.

4.1 Hierarchy Culture Practices

Respondents indicated their level of agreement with six statements measuring hierarchy culture practices on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Hierarchy Culture Practices

Hierarchy Culture Items	SD (%)	D (%)	NS (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
The university operates under clearly defined rules and procedures	2.2	7.7	7.7	63.7	18.7	3.89	0.87
Formal policies guide employee behaviour	6.6	14.3	4.4	56.0	18.7	3.66	1.14
There is a clear chain of command	3.3	11.0	5.5	50.5	29.7	3.92	1.05
Stability and order are emphasized	8.8	16.5	17.6	39.6	17.6	3.41	1.21
Decisions follow established procedures	4.4	13.2	6.6	60.4	15.4	3.69	1.03
Compliance with regulations is highly emphasized	4.4	5.5	13.2	57.1	19.8	3.82	0.96
Overall Hierarchy Culture						3.73	0.83

The findings indicate that hierarchy culture practices were reported at moderate to high levels across the participating public universities, with an overall mean score of 3.73 (SD = 0.83).

The highest-rated practice was the existence of a clear chain of command ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.05$), followed by clearly defined rules and procedures ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.87$) and emphasis on compliance with institutional regulations ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.96$). These patterns suggest that formal organizational structures, standardized procedures, and accountability mechanisms are well established within the sampled universities. However, respondents expressed comparatively lower agreement regarding the emphasis placed on organizational stability and order ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.21$), suggesting that perceptions of organizational stability were less consistent than perceptions of other hierarchy practices. Overall, the findings suggest that hierarchy culture constitutes an important characteristic of organizational management within public universities in the Rift Valley Region of Kenya.

4.2 Relationship Between Hierarchy Culture Practices and Institutional Positioning

Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to assess whether hierarchy culture practices were significantly associated with institutional positioning. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation between Hierarchy Culture Practices and Institutional Positioning

Variable	Hierarchy Culture	Institutional Positioning
Hierarchy Culture	1.000	
Institutional Positioning	.610**	1.000

Note. ** indicates significance at the .01 level (two-tailed).

The analysis showed a positive and statistically significant relationship between hierarchy culture practices and institutional positioning ($r = .610$, $p < .001$). The correlation coefficient indicates a moderately strong positive association, suggesting that universities characterised by stronger hierarchy culture practices tend to report higher levels of institutional positioning. The findings suggest that formal governance structures, standardized procedures, accountability mechanisms, and effective coordination are associated with more favourable institutional positioning.

4.3 Diagnostic Tests

Before the regression analysis was conducted, the assumptions underlying simple linear regression were examined. Visual inspection of scatterplots supported the assumption of an approximately linear relationship between hierarchy culture practices and institutional positioning. Examination of standardized residual plots indicated that the residuals were randomly distributed with constant variance, supporting the assumption of homoscedasticity. Normal probability plots further showed that the residuals approximated a normal distribution. The Durbin–Watson statistic indicated that the residuals were independent, satisfying the assumption of independence of errors. Since the regression model contained only one predictor variable, multicollinearity was not assessed because it is not applicable in simple linear regression. The diagnostic results therefore suggested that the examined regression assumptions were sufficiently satisfied.

4.4 Effect of Hierarchy Culture Practices on Institutional Positioning

Simple linear regression analysis was performed to assess whether hierarchy culture practices significantly predicted institutional positioning.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
1	.610	.372	.370	.66254

a. Predictors: (Constant), Hierarchy culture

The regression model produced a correlation coefficient of $R = .610$, indicating a moderately strong positive relationship between hierarchy culture practices and institutional positioning. The model explained 37.2% of the variation in institutional positioning ($R^2 = .372$), while the adjusted coefficient of determination (Adjusted $R^2 = .370$) provided a closely comparable estimate after adjustment for the number of predictors. In the context of organizational and social science research, this signifies substantial explanatory power, indicating that hierarchy culture practices are an important predictor of institutional positioning.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model	Squares	Sum of	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	70.443	1	70.443	160.477	.000b
	Residual	118.958	271	.439		
	Total	189.402	272			

a. Dependent Variable: Positioning

b. Predictors: (Constant), Hierarchy culture

The regression model was statistically significant as shown by the analysis of variance ($F(1, 271) = 160.477, p < .001$). This finding indicates that hierarchy culture practices were significant predictors of institutional positioning and that the regression model provides a significantly better fit than a model without the predictor variable.

Table 5. Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	β	t	Sig.
Constant	1.486		7.997	.000
Hierarchy Culture Practices	.616	.610	12.668	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Positioning

The regression coefficients revealed that hierarchy culture practices was positively and significantly associated with institutional positioning ($B = .616, \beta = .610, t = 12.668, p < .001$). The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .610$) indicates a moderately strong positive standardized association, implying that higher hierarchy culture scores were associated with higher scores in institutional positioning. Specifically, a one-unit increase in the hierarchy culture score was associated with a 0.616-unit increase in institutional positioning. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis stating that hierarchy culture practices have no statistically significant effect on the institutional positioning of public universities in the Rift Valley Region of Kenya was rejected. The findings provide empirical evidence that strengthening formal organizational structures, standardized operating procedures, clearly defined reporting relationships, and accountability mechanisms are associated with more favourable positioning of public universities.

4.5 Discussions of the Findings

The study examined the effect of hierarchy culture practices on the institutional positioning of public universities in the Rift Valley Region of Kenya. The descriptive findings revealed that hierarchy culture practices were reported at moderate to high levels across the participating universities, as reflected by an overall mean score of 3.73. Respondents most strongly agreed that their universities operated through clearly defined reporting relationships, established rules and procedures, and strong emphasis on regulatory compliance. These findings suggest that public universities reported formal governance structures that promote accountability, coordination, and consistency in organizational operations. However, the comparatively lower rating for organizational stability and order indicates that the implementation of hierarchy culture practices may vary across institutions, possibly due to differences in leadership approaches, organizational history, or institutional capacity.

The correlation analysis demonstrated a positive and statistically significant relationship between hierarchy culture practices and institutional positioning ($r = .610$, $p < .001$). This finding suggests that universities characterised by stronger formal structures, standardized procedures, and accountability mechanisms tended to report favourable institutional positioning. Effective governance systems may contribute to institutional reputation, stakeholder confidence, and the capacity of universities to compete for students, research funding, strategic partnerships, and other valuable resources.

Simple linear regression analysis further established that hierarchy culture practices was a statistically significant predictor of institutional positioning ($\beta = .610$, $p < .001$). The standardized regression coefficient indicates a moderately strong positive association, while the model explained 37.2% of the variation in institutional positioning ($R^2 = .372$). This level of explanatory power suggests that hierarchy culture is an important organizational factor influencing the strategic positioning of public universities. Although other organizational and environmental factors also contribute to institutional positioning, the findings indicate that strengthening hierarchy culture practices may contribute to improving institutional competitiveness and long-term sustainability.

The findings are consistent with Johnson's Cultural Web Theory, which proposes that organizational structures, routines, control systems, and power relationships shape employee behaviour and organizational outcomes (Johnson et al., 2008). The prominence of clearly defined reporting structures, formal procedures, and accountability mechanisms within the participating universities illustrates how these cultural elements facilitate effective coordination, consistency in decision-making, and successful implementation of institutional strategies. By embedding these practices within organizational systems, universities create an environment that supports effective governance and may support institutional positioning.

Public universities operate within a highly regulated environment where compliance with accreditation requirements, quality assurance standards, and government policies is essential. The positive association with hierarchy culture observed in this study suggests that universities that consistently uphold formal governance structures and accountability mechanisms may be better positioned to gain the confidence of students, government agencies, development partners, employers, and other stakeholders. This enhanced legitimacy may contribute to stronger institutional positioning.

The findings are consistent with those reported by Demissie and Egziabher (2022), who found that hierarchy-oriented organizational cultures enhanced institutional effectiveness in Ethiopian public universities by improving administrative coordination, policy implementation, and governance. Similarly, Al-Shamali et al. (2022) reported that formal governance systems strengthened organizational effectiveness within higher education institutions by promoting accountability and operational efficiency. Within the Kenyan context, the findings also agree with Nderitu et al. (2021), who established that hierarchy culture was positively associated with strategy implementation among private chartered universities through clearly defined organizational procedures and accountability mechanisms. While these studies focused primarily on organizational effectiveness and strategy implementation, the present study extends existing knowledge by demonstrating that hierarchy culture practices also are associated with institutional positioning within Kenyan public universities.

The study contributes to organizational culture literature by providing empirical evidence that hierarchy culture practices are independently associated with institutional positioning rather than examining organizational culture only as a multidimensional construct. By focusing specifically on public universities in the Rift Valley Region of Kenya, the study extends the application of Johnson's Cultural Web Theory to explain how formal governance structures, standardized procedures, and accountability mechanisms shape the strategic positioning of higher education institutions. The findings also provide practical evidence that strengthening hierarchy culture practices may reinforce institutional legitimacy, improve stakeholder confidence, and reinforce the competitive position of public universities within an increasingly dynamic higher education environment.

5.0 Conclusion

This study examined the effect of hierarchy culture practices on the institutional positioning of public universities in the Rift Valley Region of Kenya. The findings established that hierarchy culture practices were positively and significantly associated with institutional positioning. Universities characterised by clearly defined organizational structures, standardized operating procedures, formal reporting relationships, and strong accountability mechanisms tended to report favourable institutional positioning. The study further established that hierarchy culture practices explained 37.2% of the variation in institutional positioning, demonstrating that formal governance systems constitute an important organizational factor influencing the strategic positioning of public universities. Although institutional positioning is also shaped by other organizational and environmental factors, the findings indicate that the development of effective hierarchy culture practices may support institutional governance, stakeholder confidence, and institutional competitiveness. The findings are consistent with Johnson's Cultural Web Theory by demonstrating that formal organizational structures, control systems, routines, and governance mechanisms may contribute to organizational legitimacy and strategic positioning. The study therefore concludes that hierarchy culture should be viewed not merely as an administrative requirement but as a strategic organizational resource with potential to support the long-term positioning and sustainability of public universities.

6.0 Recommendations

The following recommendations were drawn from the study findings:

University councils and management should strengthen hierarchy culture practices by continuously reviewing and improving organizational structures, reporting relationships, institutional policies, and standard operating procedures with the aim of enhancing accountability, coordination, and operational efficiency.

Public universities should strengthen governance and quality assurance systems by ensuring consistent implementation of institutional policies, transparent decision-making processes, and effective accountability mechanisms. Such initiatives may strengthen stakeholder confidence and improve institutional positioning.

The Commission for University Education and other higher education regulators should continue to support governance frameworks that promote accountability, transparency, and institutional effectiveness while providing universities with sufficient flexibility to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges within the higher education sector.

Future studies should examine the influence of hierarchy culture practices on institutional positioning in public and private universities located in other regions of Kenya to determine whether similar relationships exist across different institutional contexts. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine how changes in hierarchy culture practices are associated with institutional positioning over time. In addition, future research should investigate other organizational factors, including leadership practices, innovation capability, organizational learning, and digital transformation, to explain the remaining variation in institutional positioning.

REFERENCES

- Al-Shamali, F., Alenezi, A., & Alrashidi, M. (2022). Organizational culture and institutional effectiveness in higher education institutions. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 44(5), 523–538.
- Cameron, K. S., & Quinn, R. E. (2011). *Diagnosing and changing organizational culture: Based on the competing values framework* (3rd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Chatman, J. A., & Choi, A. (2022). Measuring organizational culture: Converging on definitions and approaches to advance the paradigm. In C. Newton & R. Knight (Eds.), *Handbook of research methods for organizational culture*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788976268.00014>
- Commission for University Education. (2022). *State of university education in Kenya*. Commission for University Education.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Demissie, D., & Egziabher, F. G. (2022). An investigation of organizational culture of higher education: The case of Hawassa University. *Education Research International*, 2022, Article 1222779. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/1222779>

- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101>
- Etikan, I., & Bala, K. (2017). Sampling and sampling methods. *Biometrics & Biostatistics International Journal*, 5(6), 215–217. <https://doi.org/10.15406/bbij.2017.05.00149>
- Fumasoli, T., Pinheiro, R., & Stensaker, B. (2020). Handling uncertainty of strategic ambitions: The use of organizational identity as a risk-reducing device. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 43(1), 1–13.
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2019). *Multivariate data analysis* (8th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Johnson, G., & Scholes, K. (1992). *Exploring corporate strategy* (3rd ed.). Prentice Hall.
- Johnson, G., Scholes, K., & Whittington, R. (2008). *Exploring corporate strategy* (8th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Nderitu, P. M., Mwangi, J. K., & Wanyoike, D. M. (2021). Organizational culture and strategy implementation among private chartered universities in Kenya. *International Academic Journal of Human Resource and Business Administration*, 3(10), 221–240.
- Ngao, P. M. (2023). Organizational culture and employee commitment among selected private universities in Nairobi County. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 12(4), 45–58.
- Saleh, M., & Kowalczyk, P. (2022). *Research methodology: An applied guide for social science research*. Springer.
- Yamane, T. (1967). *Statistics: An introductory analysis* (2nd ed.). Harper & Row.