



**EDUCATION-CENTERED CSR STRATEGY PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA**

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### ABSTRACT

*Africa experienced a proliferation of Public and Private Universities in the last two decades as more and more people of all demographic categorizations yearned for education. This led to massive increase in student numbers that was however, not matched by expansion of infrastructure to suit these needs. The increase in numbers resulted in stiff competition and inadequate funding, especially of public Universities that negatively impacted on service delivery. As a result, many Universities adopted strategies that would contribute to their sustainability performance. One such strategy which has been adopted is Corporate Social Responsibility. This study aimed to assess the role of education centred CSR strategy on performance of Public Universities in Kenya. It adopted the strategic choice theory and sampled a total of 306 respondents from selected Public Universities in Kenya. A semi structured questionnaire was used. The findings showed that the education centred strategy positively influenced the performance of these Universities. It therefore recommended that Universities should embrace such strategies since they contribute to the economic and social development of such institutions.*

**Key Words:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Public Universities in Kenya

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## INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility has been seen as an activity that should be carried out by all institutions (Boehe & Cruz, 2010; Wickert *et al.*, 2016). Public universities are often seen as institutions that are not established for business purpose and thus, they tend to not embrace corporate social responsibility. In reality, universities and other tertiary institutions need to carry out corporate social responsibility so as to win the goodwill of their internal and external stakeholders (Park, Chidlow & Choi, 2014). As already noted, most studies on corporate social responsibility are on large multi-national corporations while few studies have focused on higher institutions of learning (Lee, 2011).

In order to realize high performance and reduce overreliance on government funding, universities continue to explore various strategies. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is one of the areas of interest for many institutions. In recent times there has been much debate about whether corporations should be socially responsible or not and to what extent should they be responsible (Visser, 2014).

With many firms almost having similar strategies across the board, one area that has remained untapped in the market is the need for CSR and its effectiveness on institutions. Scholars Inoue and Lee (2011) argue that in the current market environment, the performance of any institution depends on its ability to effectively implement CSR as one of its strategy in achieving productivity.

Melo and Garrido-Morgado (2012) is of the view that most companies perceive CSR in Kenya as more of philanthropy. It is not anything the institutions do for profit making. The CSR activities largely focus on education and training, health and medical provision, environmental clean-ups, agriculture and food security as well as underprivileged children. In Kenya, CSR is practiced largely by large profit-making companies (Okwemba *et al.*, 2014).

## Statement of the problem

Public universities play an integral role in mentoring of the human capital which is key to Kenya achieving its strategic goal of Vision 2030. However, the proliferation of private universities has brought about stiff competition in the sector coupled with inadequate funding from the exchequer, which has affected the performance of the institutions service delivery (Shisia, Sang, Matoke & Omwario, 2014). Furthermore, in the last 5 years, public universities in Kenya have experienced numerous strikes from both teaching and non-teaching staff implying that majority of employees in public universities are dissatisfied with their working conditions (Aswani, 2013). Abdikarim (2017) also argues that financial strains and lack of adequate resources remain a bigger challenge to poor performing public universities in Kenya while their student capacity continues to increase.

As already espoused in prior section public universities performance is integral to economic growth, development of human resources and further contribute to infrastructure development and job creation in their locality. Therefore, high performing universities are agents of economic growth (Sife, Lwoga & Sanga, 2017; Valero and Van Reenen, 2019; Volchik, Oganesyanyan & Olejarz, 2018). There is a need for public universities in Kenya to adopt strategies that contributes to performance in terms of improved teaching and learning, research, human resources, facilities and infrastructure and financial resources to continue contributing to economic development. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is one of the areas of interest for many institutions. In recent times there has been much debate about whether corporations should be socially responsible or not and to what extent should they be responsible, (Visser, 2014). With many firms almost having similar strategies across the board, one area that has remained untapped in the market is CSR and its effectiveness on institutions of higher learning in Kenya.

A review of studies conducted on public universities performance in Kenya show that little attention has been given to the importance of CSR strategies on performance of public universities in Kenya. For instance, Shisia, *et al* (2014) conducted a study that focused on strategic innovation and performance of public universities in Kenya. The study established a significant relationship between strategic innovation in universities performance. On his part, Abdikarim, (2017) analyzed how service outsourcing and performance of universities in Kenya. Therefore, there is a conceptual gap on strategic imperatives of corporate social responsibilities for the performance of Public Universities in Kenya that needs address.

A near similarly study on influence of CSR strategies conducted by Wachuka (2016) focused on effect of corporate social responsibility strategy on performance: a case study of Equity Bank of Kenya, Ajide and Aderemi (2014) focused on the effects of corporate social responsibility activity disclosure on corporate profitability while Ibrahim and Hamid (2020) corporate social responsibility and financial performance of listed non-financial services companies in Nigeria. These studies also indicate that there is a contextual gap since existing studies on CSR strategy on performance have not focused on institutions of higher learning yet they are major players in education, job market and economic development. Indicators of performance for universities are different from indicators of performance for other enterprises. This study therefore examined the strategic imperatives of corporate social responsibility for the performance of Public Universities in Kenya.

### **Research Objective**

The aim of this study was to evaluate the extent to which education-centered CSR strategy relates with performance of Public Universities in Kenya.

The study was guided by the following hypothesis;

- H<sub>A</sub>: Education-Centred CSR strategy statistically significantly relate with performance of Public Universities in Kenya.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Strategic Choice Theory**

According to Child (1972) who is the proponent of strategic choice theory, the goal of institutions is to achieve high performance standards and increase efficiency to the limits of economic constraints. For the purpose of this study, public universities need to consider contextual factors as very important if they are to perform well. For instance, the administration of these institutions is tasked with the responsibility of making sound strategic decisions for their institutions and adopting modern technology to improve education outcomes to make them more competitive by producing well skilled human resources for themselves and other institutions (Schweisfurth, 2013).

Strategic decisions in institutions of higher learning like universities have significant effects on institutional outcomes. Strategic choice theory is less concerned with the functional operation of the institution and has more to do with the governance structure in institutions. Therefore, the management of public institutions are charged with the task of establishing structural reforms, manipulating environmental features, and choosing relevant performance standards in achieving institutional goals. According to the Social Change Theory, the administration of public universities plays an important role in achieving institutional outcomes through their decision making or developing strategies aimed at improving education outcomes in these institutions (Graham, Woodfield & Harrison, 2013). According to Knox (2013), the strategic decision-making functions are at three levels: Top tier or long-term planning, middle tier or functional level, and bottom tier at the individual level.

This theory is useful to this study because the administrations of public universities play an important role in achieving better education outcomes through their decision making and innovativeness through adoption of effective education-centered strategies. By fostering continuous commitment and collaboration at

different levels across, within, and between institutions and involving staff from different departments in strategic education planning via training value-based knowledge, skills, quality and tailored research the administration of public university plays a crucial role in enhancing better education for economic sustainability. This theory therefore anchors education- centred CSR strategy variable in this study.

### **Conceptual Literature**

Universities are normally identified as training and research organizations. Therefore, universities may ensure CSR by guaranteeing that their education and research activities benefit stakeholders, communities, and society. Universities should play the leading role in promoting CSR as it contributes to the development and sustainability of science, technology, and research. Through the joint efforts of governments and universities, the latter can tailor their research missions to produce research that benefits the public, the local economy, and society (Bokhari, 2017).

Governments are tasked with the responsibility of developing, enforcing, and passing laws and policies that help universities establish action plans for training students in technology, sciences and agriculture as well as the mechanical arts to meet the needs of the industry, agricultural technology and marketplace (Vasilescu, Barna, Epure, & Baicu, 2010). According to the authors, this design most importantly influences universities to follow a more active and research-intensive education strategies to benefit various spheres. Universities normally operate using the model of scientific research, which is based on rational inquiry and experimentation. Adapting this model will encourage universities to conduct research and train students to meet industrial needs in addition to public interest. CSR strategies that are education oriented enable universities to focus on broader practical education and research as they are a major force for socio-economic development ( Rhoten & Powell, 2010).

Under the mission of broadening practical education and research, universities will need to solicit for and increase research funding. Government and industry should play major roles contributing to or increasing their funding for university research, which will lead to expanding universities' roles in basic science, socio-economic, and applied technology development (Powell *et al.*, 2010). In this regard, universities, the government and local industries are partners with common and interconnected sets of social and economic goals as well as resources. These partnerships require all parties to develop human assets through useful education to stimulate regional development, innovation, and growth. Internationalization is another aspect of education and research obtained through CSR that can be used to achieve sustainability and development for universities and society whereby universities consider not only cooperation within their countries, but also extending it to other countries and regions in the world (Najjuka, 2017).

Alzyoud and Bani-Hani (2015) aimed at examining the social responsibility in higher education institutions in the Middle East. From the results of the study, the changing environment in which universities function has necessitated expansion of higher education, internationalization of education programmes, changes brought by ICT development as well as the adaptation of curricula to accommodate and capitalize on labour market requirements. A case of Hashemite University with the entire university administration population of 154 was considered to show how social responsibility which is education oriented can be used effectively by universities to ensure development and sustainability for the university and society.

A study by Meseguer-Sánchez, Abad-Segura, Belmonte-Ureña and Molina-Moreno (2020) examined the research evolution on the socio-economic and environmental dimensions on university social responsibility. According to the findings, CSR manages produces a positive impact

on society through higher education, research, and the transfer of knowledge and technology, as well as education for sustainability. Worldwide research into this subject was reviewed, covering the period 1970–2019. A bibliometric analysis of 870 articles was made. The most productive institution was found to be Wuhan University as it had effective CSR that were education centred. Evidence showed growing worldwide interest in the economic and environmental impacts of CSR.

Youtie and Shapira (2008) sought to establish how to build an innovation hub by taking a case of the transformation of university roles in regional technological and economic development. Deriving from the study findings, universities have assumed an expanded role in science and technology-based economic development to leading innovation locales. Accordingly, the role of universities has evolved from performing conventional research and education functions to serving as an innovation-promoting knowledge hub. This case was deliberated in state efforts to shift from an agricultural to an industrial to an innovation-driven economy through education CSR programmes. Central to this was the emergence of new institutional leadership, education programs, organizational forms and boundary-spanning roles that mediate among academic, educational, entrepreneurial, venture capital, industrial, and public spheres. Contrasts between Georgia Tech’s

experiences and those of university roles in selected other catch-up regions in the southern US highlighted the importance to the case of networked approaches, capacity building, technology-based entrepreneurial development, and local innovation system leadership.

### METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a positivist approach and descriptive survey design. It employed a quantitative research design. The targeted population constituted of the 31 Chartered Public Universities in Kenya. Out of these, five Universities were selected. A sample size of 306 respondents participated in the study representing an 78.26 per cent response rate. The study sampled teaching and non-teaching staff of the selected chartered Public Universities. A pilot study was done on 5% of the sample (19 respondents) who were excluded from the main study to avoid response bias. Questionnaire was the main data collection instrument. The instrument was developed from existing literature, was piloted and tested for validity and reliability tests which were passed by the instrument.

### RESULTS

The education-centred CSR strategy comprised 7 items as shown in table 1 below. None of the items recorded factor loadings below 0.50.

**Table 1: Education Centred CSR Strategy**

<b>Education centred CSR Strategy</b>	<b>Factor Loadings</b>
The university focuses on providing value-based knowledge, skills & attitudes	.622
The university is involved in quality and tailored education and research activities to benefit stakeholders, communities, and society.	.627
There is promotion of CSR to contribute to the development and sustainability of science, technology, and research.	.665
The university has established action plans for training students in technology, sciences and agriculture to meet the needs of the industry, agriculture and marketplace	.659
The university follows a more active and research-intensive education strategies to benefit various stakeholders	.662
The university has sought partnership with the government and grant agencies to improve the quality of education and research programmes	.643
The university is extending cooperation within and to other countries and regions in the world to improve education outcomes.	.656
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.6477</b>

To highlight some of the finding; The university focuses on providing value-based knowledge, skills and attitudes had factor loading of 0.622, The university is involved in quality and tailored education and research activities to benefit stakeholders, communities, and society had factor loading of 0.627, there is promotion of CSR to science, technology, and research which had a factor loading of 0.665, The average mean recorded for the 11 items was 0.6477. Because these values were above the threshold (0.5), the factors were considered valid for the constructs represented.

### Descriptive Results

The respondents were asked to indicate strategies that have been put in place by universities to improve the quality of education that benefits stakeholders, communities and the all society as shown in Table 2 below. The outcome was as follows: 61% of the respondents said that the university has Quality and tailored education research, 35.3% of the respondents said that the university normally Partner with government and other agencies, 15% of respondents said that the university Education for economic sustainability and 3% of respondents did not indicate strategies that have been put in place by universities to improve the quality of education.

**Table 2: Education-Centred CSR Strategy**

Categories of Centred CSR Strategy	Type of Centred CSR Strategy	Yes	No
Strategies put in place to improve the quality of education to benefit stakeholders, communities and society within universities	Quality and tailored education research	61.0%	39.0%
	Education for economic sustainability	15.0%	85.0%
	Partnership with government and other agencies	35.3%	64.70%
	Any Other	03.5%	96.5%
Education-based activities universities are involved in	Market based post graduate program	43.0%	57.0%
	Friendly post graduate timetable	34.0%	66.0%
	Executive lecture halls	8.70%	92.30%
	Any other	11.4%	88.6%
Most active and research-intensive education strategy that the university uses to benefit various stakeholders	Use of information and communication	16.5%	83.5%
	Opportunities to learn technologies	8.20%	91.8%
	Supporting employees in research	21.2%	78.8%
	Any other	1.30%	98.7%
Action plans implemented in the university	Updated website which includes curriculum, school activity calendar, and administration.	40.2%	59.8%
	Increased publicity	30.7%	69.3%
	Orientation for new students	36.2%	63.7%
	Any other	54.4%	45.6%

On education-based activities that the university has put in place, the results were as follows; Market based post graduate program recorded percentage of 43.0%, Friendly post graduate timetable recorded 34%, Executive lecture halls recorded 8.7% while 11.4% did not indicate any education-based activities that the university. Concerning the most active and research-intensive education strategy that the university uses to benefit various stakeholders, the response were as follows: 21.2 % of the respondent indicated Supporting employees

in research, 16.5% of the respondent indicated use of information and communication, 8.20% indicated opportunities to learn technologies and lastly 63.8% said that there is no active research intensive education strategy put in place by the universities that benefit various stakeholders. The finding clearly shows that the universities need to do more to improve the quality of research. To establish action plan being implemented within the universities, 36.2% of the respondents stated orientation for new students, 40.2% stated updated

website which includes curriculum, school activity calendar, administration, 30.7% indicated Increased publicity to market the universities while 54.5% of the respondents did not indicate any action plan being implemented within the universities.

The total number of Likert scale questions that were designed to examine existence of education-centred CSR strategy in the public universities in Kenya was 7. Respondents provided their responses to these questions based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The responses as summarized in Table 3 showed that most of the participants of this study agreed that the university focuses on providing value-based knowledge, skills & attitudes (mean =3.57, SD = 1.31), it is involved in quality and tailored education and research activities to benefit stakeholders, communities, and society (mean =3.63, SD = 1.22), and that there is promotion of CSR to contribute to the development and sustainability of science, technology, and research (mean =3.62, SD = 1.29). Moreover, the results show that respondents agree that the university has

established action plans for training students in technology, sciences and agriculture to meet the needs of the industry, agriculture and marketplace (mean =3.6, SD = 1.3) and it follows a more active and research-intensive education strategies to benefit various stakeholders (mean =3.57, SD = 1.3).

From the results it can be inferred that respondent agreed that the university has sought partnership with the government and grant agencies to improve the quality of education and research programmes (mean =3.57, SD = 1.33), and that universities are extending cooperation within and to other countries and regions in the world to improve education outcomes (mean =3.49, SD = 1.39). The standard deviation for all the items was above 1 which indicates that the responses provided were widely dispersed because of varying education-centred CSR strategy across various public universities. Nevertheless, as shown by an average mean of 3.58, most of the respondents agreed that public universities have put in place various education-centred CSR strategy aimed at improving institutional performance.

**Table 3: Descriptive Results on Education-Centred CSR Strategy**

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std Dev
The university focuses on providing value-based knowledge, skills & attitudes	11.8%	12.1%	10.5%	39.2%	26.5%	3.57	1.31
The university is involved in quality and tailored education and research activities to benefit stakeholders, communities, and society.	8.5%	11.8%	13.4%	40.8%	25.5%	3.63	1.22
The university has established action plans for training students in technology, sciences and agriculture to meet the needs of the industry, agriculture and marketplace	10.5%	12.1%	13.4%	35.3%	28.8%	3.60	1.30
The university follows a more active and research-intensive education strategies to benefit various stakeholders	11.8%	10.8%	12.7%	38.2%	26.5%	3.57	1.30
The university has sought partnership with the government and grant agencies to improve the quality of education and research programmes	12.4%	10.8%	12.4%	35.9%	28.4%	3.57	1.33
The university is extending cooperation within and to other countries and regions in the world to improve education outcomes.	16.0%	8.8%	11.4%	37.3%	26.5%	3.49	1.39
<b>Average</b>						<b>3.58</b>	<b>1.31</b>



The findings of this study concurred with past studies such as Allyn and Bokhari (2017) who found that public universities working closely with governments to tailor their education systems to

produce outcomes that benefits the local economy, public and society at large, have higher performance.

### Regression Results

**Table 4: Regression Analysis for Education-Centred CSR Strategy and Performance of public Universities in Kenya with no moderator.**

Model	R	R Sq.	Adjusted R Sq.	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.631 <sup>a</sup>	.398	.396	.7266526	.335

a. Predictors: (Constant), Education-centred CSR strategy and Performance of public universities in Kenya.

### Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Sq.	Df.	Mean Sq.	F	Sig.
1	Reg	106.250	1	106.250	201.222	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual.	160.519	304	.528		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>266.769</b>	<b>305</b>			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of public universities in Kenya

a. Predictors: (constant), Education- centred CSR strategy

### Overall regression coefficients

	Un Std Coeff		Std Coeff	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Er	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.437	.147		9.765	.000		
Education-centred CSR strategy	.560	.039	.631	14.185	.000	1.000	1.000

The models fitted to the data were as follows:  $Y=1.437+ 0.560X_2$  with corresponding p- values of 0.000 being lower than 0.05 significance level against t-statistics values. The models indicated that for every unit of Education- centred CSR strategy the value of performance of public universities in Kenya changes by 0.560. A unit change in education centered strategy therefore, increased performance of Public Universities by 56%.

These results were consistent with previous studies which have shown positive and significant influence of education-centred CSR strategies on institutional performance. Accordingly, the changing environment in which universities function has necessitated expansion of higher education, internationalization of education programmes, changes brought by ICT development as well as the adaptation of curricula to accommodate and capitalize on labour market requirements so as to

improve their performance (Alzyoud & Bani-Hani, 2015). Youtie and Shapira (2008) also noted that universities have assumed an expanded role in science and technology-based economic development to leading innovation locales by evolving from performing conventional research and education functions to serving as an innovation-promoting knowledge hub which has enhanced their educational performance. Moreover, emergence of new education programs and boundary-spanning academic and research roles drive universities to be more competitive (Alzyoud *et al.*, 2015).

The findings also concur with strategic choice theory which suggests that the management of public institutions are charged with the task of establishing structural reforms, manipulating environmental features, and choosing relevant performance standards in achieving institutional

goals. In this regard, by developing strategies aimed at improving education outcomes in public universities, these institutions stand a better chance of enhancing their overall performance (Graham, Woodfield & Harrison, 2013).

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that there are several education-centred CSR strategies in public universities in Kenya aimed at improving performance. A unit change in education-centred CSR strategies results to a positive and significant variation in performance of Public Universities in Kenya. Provision of value-based knowledge, skills & attitudes, involvement in quality and tailored education and research activities, promotion of CSR to contribute to the development and sustainability of science, technology, and research and an action

plan established for training students in technology, sciences and agriculture to meet the needs of the industry among other sectors would lead to improved performance of public universities in Kenya.

This study recommended that public universities need to establish education-centred CSR strategies as it was empirically shown that provision of value-based knowledge, skills & attitudes, involvement in quality and tailored education and research activities, promotion of CSR to contribute to the development and sustainability of science, technology, and research and an action plan established for training students in technology, sciences and agriculture to meet the needs of the industry among other sectors results to improvement in performance of public universities in Kenya.

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