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Original Research Article

**Strategic Thinking on Service Delivery In Private Universities Offering Open And Distance Learning In The Kampala Metropolitan Area, Uganda****Ronald Mbago¹, Chris U A Ukaidi², Friday Ogbu Edeh³, Evelyn Ugonna Ukaidi⁴, Mugume Tom⁵**^{1,2,3,4,5}*Department of Business Management, Kampala International University*

Abstract: This study focused on how strategic thinking influence service delivery in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) private universities in Kampala Metropolitan Area (KMA) in Uganda. In higher education, the importance of the services becomes more and more significant, particularly in the ODL environment, thus this study aimed to determine the influence of strategic thinking as managerial competence towards service quality and service responsiveness. The researchers had mixed method design with a total of 305 respondents: 283 academic staff and 10 key informants from five selected private universities. Descriptive statistics, correlation and hierarchical regression analysis were used for the quantitative data and qualitative data was collected through interviews. Results indicated that in the frustrative component strategic thinking was significantly and positively associated with service delivery ($\beta = 0.594$), accounting for 38.1% of the variance in service delivery. Some of these included proactive planning, aligning resources and focus, and maintaining a long time frame. To complement these findings, the qualitative data highlighted the importance of strategic thinking in creating innovation, good leadership and customer-oriented services. But the research also found challenges such as short-termism, resistance to change and a lack of stakeholder involvement in the effective implementation of strategic activities. The study ends with the conclusion that it is crucial to have strategic thinking skills for staff and leadership in improving service delivery in private universities that provides ODL. Targeted leadership training, a culture of innovation and the incorporation of strategic management in daily operations are suggested. Since only 63.2% of the variance in service delivery was explained, the study calls for additional research in order to investigate other factors that influence the effectiveness of services in higher learning institutions. The results add to the knowledge base on institutional performance and strategic management in Sub-Saharan Africa's higher education system.

Keywords: *Strategic Thinking, Service Delivery, Private Universities***1. Introduction**

Service delivery refers to understanding the satisfaction of a company's products and services with customers' needs and requirements. It covers the measurement of customers' satisfaction of the company's products or services, which could be an overall impression a customer gets from the products/services provided by the Company (Habu, 2016). Service delivery states Mohamed (2020) is the measure of customer perception of the service level provided by institutions, usually measured on a Likert Scale based on surveys. According to Zhang and Hu (2018) service delivery refers to the degree of services and products that a business delivers is congruent with the customer's expectations which affects their satisfaction. Moreover, service delivery is perceived as "rating of customers' interactions and experiences of a company's services based on customers' expectations" as given by Aydin and Özer (2020). Lee et al. (2021) define service delivery as how much a

customer's experience with a service matches their expectations and whether this is satisfactory or not.

Luate (2019) defines service delivery as the sum total of all the perceptions, evaluations and emotional feelings experienced by customers during a product or service. Service delivery, says Kumar and Sethi (2017), is the handling of the service provided by the service provider to its customers in order to satisfy customer needs and expectations. It includes task management as a well-planned and organized process to achieve customer satisfaction. Similarly, Brown and Harris (2021) consider service delivery to be a complex issue also encompassing the provision of services, as well as managing the delivery in terms of its production and management. The purpose of such service delivery is to ensure that customers' expectations are met, and perhaps even exceeded, using well-structured service delivery

methods. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2018) define service delivery as the chain of activities and interactions between the service organisation and the customer, highlighting the need to meet customer needs and improve customer experiences. Delivering excellent services is paramount to gaining high customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Service Delivery Assessment is critical to companies that want to enhance the level of satisfaction they get from their customers; and strive to create loyal customers. Knowing the level of service quality perceived by the customers helps the company to know their strengths and weaknesses and then plan the aspects that need to be improved and adjust to the changing demands.

Companies that can measure service delivery will be able to provide a better customer experience and stay competitive with customer preferences and market trends. Feedback gathered from customers via surveys and other assessment techniques helps to improve customer service approaches and customer business. This assessment exercise helps businesses understand their employees and customers' expectations to align products and services that better meet market needs. In conclusion, service delivery assessment is a critical tool for continual enhancement and building strong customer relationships.

1. Problem statement

The delivery of services in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions in Uganda has become much more significant given the ever rising students demands and technological development as well as the competitiveness of institutions. Many of Kampala Metropolitan Area (KMA) private Universities have challenges in consistently providing quality service in line with learner expectations despite the ODL promise of flexibility and greater access (Luate, 2019; Habu, 2016). The literature emphasizes the importance of strategic thinking as a key management skill in visioning, planning and making effective decision for longterm future which therefore impacts positively on achieving good service delivery outcomes (Ochieng & Muturi, 2017; Moyo & Hadebe, 2016). Lee and Choi (2016) and Tabrizi and Shakib (2016) indicate that institutions that take on strategic thinking can be more responsive and understand the clients' needs while triggering the institutional development to achieve its goals.

But, in Uganda private university sector and especially ODL directionally, there are little empirical evidence on the influence of strategic thinking by academic and administrative staff on service delivery outcome. There have been complaints about inconsistency in service delivery, lack of vision regarding visioning by institutions, The inefficiency in their operations, a possible gap in the application of strategic thinking

(Tweneyo & Mugarura, 2021). Furthermore, resistance to change, lack of training and lack of long-term planning have been identified as factors that hinder the change (Olayemi, 2017; Gonzalez, 2019). This begs the question of how far can strategic thinking impact service delivery in private universities that provide ODL in KMA Uganda? This is treated as a gap since its resolution is imperative for improving student satisfaction, institution's performance and competitiveness in ODL.

2. Literature Review /Empirical review

How strategic thinking can affect service delivery is a proof in the empirical research work. For example, Ochieng and Muturi (2017) analysed and investigated the impact of strategic thinking on service delivery in public organizations in Kenya. Using a mixed method with surveys and interviews with public sector managers it was found that those organizations that subscribed to strategic thinking had significant gains with respect to the efficiency in service delivery and responsiveness to community needs. Moyo and Hadebe (2016) in another study reported that institutions that successfully used strategic thinking had the capacity to provide for learners' needs resulting in learner satisfaction and engagement. In like manner, Ademola and Ige (2017) established that strategic thinking was significantly related to the enhancement of the quality of service delivery which encompasses patients satisfactions, operating efficiencies etc. Strategic thinking is even more important to improve the service delivery as Tabrizi and Shakib (2016) emphasize its importance in promoting innovations and adaptability among employees. Businesses that are able to foster a culture of strategic thinking are better able to respond to customers' requirements. They found that when organizations embrace strategic thinking models, their responsiveness and quality of their service delivery improves. In other research, Lee and Choi (2016) found that there is a significant relationship between strategic thinking practices and the permanent performance in service delivery. Strategic thinkers reported more positive outcomes for service and also more job satisfaction than other employees. Also, action for strategic thinking resulted in more efficient service delivery processes and more satisfaction of the public as indicated by Olayemi (2017). But issues including resistance to change were highlighted. Organizations with more strategic thinking were significantly more likely to report higher levels of service delivery outcomes, for example, greater engagement with the community and the use of resources (Liu and Zhang, 2021). Furthermore, the findings by Nordin and Idris (2022) highlighted that strategic thinking was found to be significantly related to service delivery in the education sector with particular focus on experience of the learner and effectiveness of the institution.

Kearns (2016) found that when an organization has a strategic thinking culture, they're more likely to predict market tweaks and consequently possess improved service delivery results. In the same way, Van der Voet (2016) noted that strategic thinking enables the effective allocation and prioritization of resources that can in turn, lead to an improved level of service and customer satisfaction. Specifically, Acar et al., (2018) emphasizes the importance of strategic thinking attitude in organizations where it is known that they can better identify changes in consumer demand and thus their service delivery performances are better. Similarly, Kim and Park (2020) discovered that strategic thinking in the handling of operations results in better resource sharing and quality of services. The studies also emphasize the importance of imparting the spirit of strategic thinking to the culture of the organization. As O'Connor & McCoy (2021) explains, companies with strategic thinking can equip their workers with strategic insights that help them make proactive decisions and consequently increase the overall effectiveness of service delivery. But there were also points about problems associated with implementing strategic thinking. Some scholars indicated that traditional organizational structures are not always conducive to innovative thinking and effective service delivery (Harrison, 2017). Others highlighted the need for continuing education for strategic competence in the staff (Pettigrew et al., 2016). The Literature Review reveals a consistent positive relationship between strategic thinking and improving the delivery of services in a range of sectors such as banking, hospitality, non profit and higher education. Nevertheless, the studies also highlight various challenges and contextual factors that may affect this relationship. Further studies are required, to delve deeper into these intricacies and understand the effective application of strategic thought processes in improving service delivery in various types of organizations.

Research Methodology

Research Philosophical Paradigms, Approaches, and Design

This study employed a pragmatic approach, since the pragmatic approach is the preferred paradigm when dealing with real-world phenomenon such as sustainability issues in organizations, as a single approach to methodology may suffice (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The use of qualitative and quantitative approach reflects the holistic understanding of phenomena being investigated in adherence with the pragmatism approach in understanding outcomes. Further, the pragmatic paradigm is flexible and adapts to the research process based on what is found, this is especially significant in our organizational sustainability

area, where contextual considerations can have a significant impact on outcomes (Bryman, 2016).

Research Approaches

The researchers used a mixed methods approach which was recommended by Voss (2016). The study used a mixed methods which has proved appropriate as both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to give complete interpretation of the findings. This approach enabled the methodological triangulation, which showed a comparison of results from the two methods (Combs & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). The mixed methods served to validate the instruments since they were used to determine their suitability through diverse data sources, and proved useful in conceptualising constructs, identifying behaviours, and developing and testing the instruments, as advocated by Onwuegbuzie et al., (2010). Academic staff were asked for quantitative data and the administrators and IT specialists for qualitative data. Through this approach, all of the researchers' hypotheses were standardized and known relationships among the independent variables had been ascertained – correlations between the constructs of management competencies and job engagement as well as their impacts on service delivery in Private Universities providing ODL were known, thus establishing relationships between causes and effects (Park et al., 2020).

Research Design

The methodology followed was a sequential explanatory mixed approach, specifically, the quantitative approach was followed by qualitative approach to data analysis (Fetters et al., 2013, Creswell & Clark, 2017). It was a 'building' approach with findings of the first phase informing the data collection of the next phase (Fetters et al., 2013). In addition, a descriptive cross sectional and correlational research design was used. The descriptive aspect of study was intended to describe the characteristics of the respondents and the study employed descriptive survey which was determined based on the advantages of descriptive survey in collecting data from target population (Creswell, 2014). Cohen et al (2010); explained that guideline correlational analysis helps discover the sincere relationship between variables.

Study Population, sample size and sampling Technique

The study population consisted all Academic Staff in Kampala Metropolitan area, in five selected private chartered universities. These institutions include Uganda Christian University (UCU), Uganda Martyrs University (UMU), Kampala International University (KIU), Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) and Ndejje University (NU).

Table 1: Population, Sample Size Distribution and Sampling Techniques

Respondents	Population	Sample size	Sampling Technique
KIU	388	91	Simple Random sampling
IUTU	264	62	Simple Random sampling
NU	178	42	Simple Random sampling
UCU	286	67	Simple Random sampling
UMU	182	43	Simple Random sampling
Administrators (HR)	5	5	Purposive sampling
IT specialists	5	5	Purposive sampling
TOTAL	1298	305	

Source: Human Resource Department of Selected universities, 2024

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Primary data and Secondary data were used as two method in collecting data in this study. The use of secondary data was a choice based upon recent research that recommended an increase in the use of secondary data to enhance collection and analysis of primary data (Nicholson & Bennett, 2008). It is worth noting that data obtained from secondary sources will serve as a background information while data obtained from primary sources, which are specific to the objectives of the study, will suit the study's research requirements (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005). The data were obtained from questionnaires which were handed to the respondents by the researcher and research assistants as primary data. The questionnaire method was selected due to the flexibility and efficiency to collect data using Likert scale. Besides, an interview guide was used to gather qualitative data to help clarify the information and enable to elicit participants' perspectives on the relationship of management competencies, work engagement and service delivery in private Universities offering ODL in Kampala Metropolitan Area, Uganda. Academic staff participating in these universities were targeted with questionnaires. Secondary data was collected from reliable education service providers like, Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES), Education Service Commission (ESC), National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) and district councils overseeing secondary education services in the area. Further secondary data were also collected from various Universities and Institutions of the country such as Makerere University Library and other Universities in the country. Newspaper articles, internet sites and other relevant materials were used and informal discussions with students took place too.

Validity and reliability of the Instrument

The instruments were presented to five experts in the field who were asked to mark in a scale from very relevant (5) to not relevant (1) for each item on the instruments; a content validity assessment was carried out. As recommended by Amin (2005), the expert's valid answer was divided by the total number of items to measure the Content Validity Index (CVI) and obtain a

value of >0.7 was the criteria for considering the CVI as acceptable. Review of the instrument by the expert at the pre-test/pilot phase was used to see if the instrument was content valid. This study aimed to gather experts' perspectives concerning clarity, relevance and efficacy of the questionnaire in measuring the study constructs. All instruments total mean Content Validity Index (CVI) ranged from 0.82, a good validity, where all items mean CVI was >0.7 . Qualitative validity was achieved via the use of qualitative triangulation in relation to different sources, methods and theories. Interviews, observations, and document analysis were some of the methods used that ensured the data toughness. Moreover, trustworthiness of findings from expert interviews and evaluative judgment of the researcher further bolstered the trustworthiness of the findings. High reliability of the research was obtained with the values of Cronbach's Alpha of all variables ranged above 0.70 and the average value of all variables was > 0.78 . This shows that the degree of internal consistency is good, proving the instruments were reliable (Amin, 2005).

Research Procedure

After approval of the proposal and ethical clearance from both KIU, UNCST and the National ethics committee, the researcher trained assistants and obtained the permission of the private universities. Questionnaires were sent out to foreign academic staff and signed consent was collected. Same day return and completeness checks were highlighted when the data was being collected. Interviews were conducted individually, enabling detailed insights that were freely given and the researcher took good notes.

Data Management, Analysis and Presentation

Data gathering started with coding, editing and entry of responses answered in the questionnaires in the SPSS, while questionnaires with incomplete and inconsistent responses were not included. The Little's MCAR test and EM estimation for missing values were used to ensure the quality of the data. Data integrity was checked by the use of box plots to remove any outliers after which diagnostic tests were performed for multicollinearity, heteroskedasticity, and normality. We used univariate (descriptive statistics), bivariate (t-test, ANOVA, and

correlation) and multivariate (hierarchical regression) quantitative analysis. Qualitative subtleties confirmed the quantitative results and were in line with Pallant (2005) and other academic standards.

The relationships were studied using a multiple regression model proposed in this study. Strategic thinking was included as an independent variable in the analysis to detect what effects it had on the dependent variable; service delivery as experienced in private universities offering ODL. The dependent variable was tested with the selected independent variables to understand the association. The structured regression models were developed as:

$$\gamma = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

γ = Dependent Variable

X_1 -2 = Independent variables

β_0 is service delivery when the independent variables are zero

β_1 -3 = the Regression coefficient of the independent variables

ϵ = is the error term

Model

$$\gamma = \beta_0 + \beta_1 St + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots (2)$$

Testing for the effect of strategic thinking on service delivery in Private Universities offering ODL. This model was adopted. Where, St = Strategic thinking

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines, with informed consent, confidentiality, identity coding and institutional approval obtained. Avoidance of harm and deception were considered and participants were informed of their rights, including that of withdrawal. The limitations included cross-sectional nature, which did not enable much insights into the changes in a long term service delivery in ODL universities. There may have been a cultural bias and a self-reported data bias. In addition, the findings of the study might not be extended to other private universities outside Kampala Metropolitan area.

3. Results

Response Rate

Table 2

Response Rate

Response rate	Sample size	Percentage (%)
Received questionnaires	283	92.7
Missed questionnaires	22	7.2
Interviews with Key informants	10	100
Total	305	100

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Credibility and reliability of the study was strengthened by the high participation rate of the 283 returned questionnaires representing 92.7% of the targeted questionnaires and all 10 key informants have been interviewed. The high participation reduced the non-response bias and increased the generalizability. This was brought about by successful follow up activities, cooperation and strategically identified informed interviewees from ODL Universities in KMA.

University Name of the Respondents.

Table 3: University Name

University	Frequency	Percent
Kampala International University	104	36.6
Ndejje University	44	15.5
Uganda Christian University	53	18.7
Uganda Martyrs University	44	15.5
Islamic University in Uganda		
Total	37	13.0
	283	100.0

Source: Primary data, 2024

According to Table 3, foreign academic staff are distributed equally among the five private universities with the highest of 36.6% in KIU followed by UCU, NU, Umu and IUIU. KIU's dominance is attributed to its first ranking among the private universities in Uganda. It attracts more foreign staff and students by its high visibility and high academic status. This is a manifestation of the overall popularity of institutions with high rankings that provide ODL.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for strategic thinking

	Descriptive Statistics	
	Mean	Std. Deviation
Strategic thinking	22.7420	6.53039

Source: Primary Data, 2024.

Table 4 shows that the descriptive statistics for strategic thinking have different levels of perceived effectiveness for the respective mode of response provided. This competency, strategic thinking (MEAN = 22.74), is something that respondent tend to perceive as very effective. This is a high score and indicates that staff or the respondents (engaged with the survey) either strongly agree that strategic thinking is important or that it is an effective approach within the organisation. The standard deviation value was 6.53, suggesting some variability, although most found it effective in their responses. Strategic thinking as a core competency implies that team members are connected with the overall strategy of the organization and supports the strategic focus/strategic planning in the team.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for Service delivery

Descriptive Statistics	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tangibility	13.83	3.46
Reliability	12.75	3.51
Responsiveness	19.32	3.61
Assurance	13.11	2.88
Empathy	20.13	3.56

Source: Primary Data, 2024

The results reveal that empathy was ranked highest (mean = 20.14) meaning that it had very good score in terms of its effectiveness in service delivery with consistent perceptions by the respondents. Responsiveness was also at a high level (mean = 19.33) although with some variability, so there is an opportunity for further development. Tangibility, reliability and assurance, however, scored lower, indicating confusion or less acceptance in terms of effectiveness. These areas need to be improved to increase the overall quality of service provided by organisations and the satisfaction of customers.

Correlation

Correlation indicates the linear relationships among variables and can be either positive, negative or none (Hair et al., 2014). There are several measures of bivariate correlation, such as Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient, Spearman's rho and Kendall's tau, but Pearson's correlation is recommended as suitable for testing directional and non-directional hypotheses (Field, 2005). Based on the analysis results, it was found that all of the study variables were positively related as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Correlation between Strategic Thinking and Service Delivery in Private Universities offering ODL

		Correlations			
		Strategic thinking	Flexibility	Collaboration	Service delivery
Strategic thinking	Pearson Correlation	1	.808**	.434**	.603**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
Service delivery	Pearson Correlation	.603**	.698**	.646**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
N		283	283	283	283

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

Source: Primary data 2024

The correlation test results obtained a value of $r = 0.603$ at $p < 0.01$, which means that strategic thinking and service delivery have a moderate relationship, as high strategic thinking and planning affects service effectiveness. A good strategist within a company can foresee customer needs and respond more proficiently. Thus it highlights the importance of encouraging strategic management skills among ODL institutions. Strategic thinking can result in a more proactive customer-centric service delivery.

Regression Analysis

To determine the effect of strategic thinking on service delivery in ODL universities, hierarchical regression was used to control the effect of demographic variables. Confounder variables of Gender, Age, Education, Experience and Position were string set in initial models. Results provided in Tables 7 through 8 supported that the predictive model was effective in explaining the variation in service delivery.

Hierarchical regression analysis showing the predictive power of strategic thinking on service delivery in Private Universities offering ODL.

Table 7: Hierarchical Multiple Linear Regression of Service delivery with Strategic thinking

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	Beta	B	Beta
Constant	78.783		54.369	
Gender	.117	.004	-1.619	-.060
Age	-.857	-.040	.789	.036
Education	-3.106	-.147	-1.298	-.062
Experience	1.381	.111	1.112	.089
Position	2.700	.251	.459	.043
Strategic thinking			1.117	.594
R ²		0.051		0.381
Adj R ²		0.034		0.368
R ² change		0.051		0.330
F change		2.988		147.295
Sig. F change		0.012		0.001
F		2.988		28.354
Sig.		.012		<.001

Dependent variable: Service delivery. * Regression coefficient is significant at the 0.05 level (2- tailed). Regression coefficient is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

Model 1:

With the addition of the control or confounding variables Gender, Age, Education, Experience, and Position in Model 1, the model accounted for only 3.4 percent (Adjusted R-square = 0.034) of the variance in service delivery with an F change of 2.988 and $p < 0.05$. In these variables, only Position is positively significant $\beta = 0.251$ and the p value $p < 0.01$, while Gender with a beta = 0.004 and $p > 0.01$, Age with a beta = -0.040 and ($p > 0.01$), Education with beta = -0.147 and $p > 0.01$ and Experience with beta = 0.111 and ($p > 0.01$) does not have a significant effect on service delivery.

Model 2:

Adding strategic thinking offered an additional 36.8 percent (Adjusted R-squared change of 0.368) to the variance in the service delivery and increased the power of the model to 38.1 percent (R-squared = 0.381) Model 2. Strategic thinking was found to be highly positively associated with service delivery with beta value of 0.594 ($p < 0.01$); strategic thinking had a significant impact on service delivery in that an increase in one is correlated with an increase in the other. This finding indicates that private universities must pay attention to developing strategic thinking skills of staff and management, with an ultimate aim of enhancing student outcome and student satisfaction.

Table 8: ANOVA and Coefficients results for Strategic Thinking and Service Delivery

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15481.435	1	15481.435	160.912	.000 ^b
	Residual	27035.088	281	96.210		
	Total	42516.523	282			

a. Dependent Variable: Service delivery

b. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic thinking

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1(Constant)	53.359	2.116			25.217	.000
Strategic thinking	1.135	.089	.603		12.685	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Service delivery

The ANOVA results reveal that the regression model is statistically significant ($p < .001$) and hence it explains much of the variance in the dependent variable. The intercept coefficient is 53.359 which is the value predicted of the dependent variable when the independent variable is 0. The slope coefficient of "Strategic thinking" is equal to 1.135; the dependent variable increases by 1.135 units when the independent variable increases by one unit.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

The model equation is therefore, $Y = 53.359 + 1.135X_1$

Based on the regression model, the strategic thinking has a significant relationship and a positive value with service delivery with a slope value of 1.135 and intercept value of 53.359. This contradicts hypothesis H01, indicating strategic thinking does impact service delivery in ODL universities. The variation explained by the model is 38.1% (Adjusted R^2 is 36.8%) with the remaining 63.2% explained by other factors that are not included in the model. These findings bring attention to the need of strategic thinking at the level of providing services.

Hypothesis Results

It revealed that the relationship between strategic thinking and service delivery was significant with positive slope / Beta = 0.594, $p < 0.01$) and it rejected the null hypothesis that there is not a significant relationship between strategic thinking and service delivery. This means that improvements in strategic thought of lecturers result in improvements in delivering services for private universities that provide ODL. These findings were complemented by qualitative data from key informants, which included a focus on strategic thinking to align resources, promote innovation and satisfy stakeholders. Participants identified that proactive leadership promotes creating and good service delivery. The qualitative and quantitative result intersect, indicating that the competency strategic thinking is one of the competencies of management personnel. Building leadership capabilities within universities to enhance services and institutional competitiveness is thus recommended.

4. Discussions

There was a significant positive correlation between strategic thinking and service delivery of private universities in Kampala metropolitan area providing ODL. Descriptive statistics and qualitative findings indicated that improvement in the thinking skills of strategic thinking positively affects service delivery results and this was supported by regression analysis. Key informants highlighted that strategic thinking leads to effective resource distribution, proactive planning and efficiency in the way services are provided, thus enhancing service quality (Lee & Choi, 2016; Moyo &

Hadebe, 2016). This is in line with the positivist view and a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Innovation, goal alignment and interdepartmental collaboration are other features that facilitated service delivery (Smith & Johnson, 2020, Taylor, 2020). The findings support other studies that have shown a relation between strategic thinking and enhancement of stakeholder satisfaction and institutional effectiveness (van der Voet, 2016; Tabrizi & Shakib, 2016).

But there were also problems with strategic thinking due to resistance to change, being short-sighted, and not engaging stakeholders (Gonzalez, 2019, Khan, 2022 & Patel, 2021). Qualitative data identified weaknesses including lack of leadership, lack of strategic direction which affect the overall delivery of services negatively (Martinez, 2021; Lee, 2020). Informants reported that institutions tend to focus on the short term rather than long term sustainability (Pettigrew, Ferlie, & McKee, 2016). Poor strategic thinking has a negative impact on staff's morale and levels of service. The present study is based on social exchange theory which proposes that strategic clarity and support from management affects staff performance (Homans, 1958). These results are backed up by previous research, which highlights that creating institutionalization of strategic thinking requires training, innovation, and structural changes (Harrison, 2017; Davis & Clark, 2022).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusions

How strategic managements such as systems thinking, thinking long term, being adaptable, assessing the risk, planning for implementation, and feedback and learning creates a mindset for strategic thinking, was uncovered in the research and organizations can use this as an opportunity to recognize the strategic goal, anticipate the obstacles and plan for innovative solutions that improve the quality of the service. In these ways, it becomes possible to make better decisions with this proactive attitude to ensure that it is not only possible to deliver the services efficiently, but also appropriately to the target group in Private Universities offering ODL.

Recommendations

Through private universities, a training programme for leaders who could be able to inculcate strategic thinking in daily activities, that's decisions could be made in line with long term goals and objectives to guarantee continuity in improved service delivery. This will facilitate overcoming certain unique problems inherent in Private Universities providing ODL like changing technology, student needs, etc.

In Ugandan private Universities, building a culture of innovation is essential to enhance service delivery in private universities where ODL is being implemented as

a strategy for dealing with some of the issues; this should invite creativity to think beyond the challenges, encourage academic and administrative personnel to be proactive to improve the experiences of students in ODL provision and their learning outcomes.

6. Areas for Further Studies

Based on the initial model, the R-squared value of the study revealed that strategic thinking was able to explain the variance in service delivery in private universities that provide ODL by 38.1%. This means there is a lot of unexplored variability: 63.2%. Future work should try to overcome this gap by adding additional constructs or changing the independent variables in order to measure the service delivery in more thorough a way. Due to the diversity of thinking in the strategy, it is impossible to elaborate on everything in a single study. In order to better understand the influence of strategic thinking in service delivery across various regions, therefore, more study in the field of strategic thinking is warranted.

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