

Research Paper



Under performance: why intrapreneurial strategies and operating environment matter in fixing performance of public universities in Kenya

Margaret K. Otolo^{1*}, Stephen M. A. Muathe², Linda Kimencu³

^{1,2,3}School of Business, Economics and Tourism, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

In 2023 the Kenyan government unveiled a new funding model aimed at promoting affordable and equitable access to higher education and at reviving public universities that would otherwise collapse because of financial challenges. This study focuses on improving performance through intrapreneurial strategies. The unit of analysis was 20 public universities and the unit of observation 400 participants. A combination of descriptive and explanatory research designs was used, and primary data collected with a semi-structured questionnaire were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics and content analysis, with multiple regression models used to test the associations between variables. The study found a statistically significant ($\beta = 0.620$, $p < 0.05$), partially moderating influence of the operating environment on the relationship between intrapreneurial strategies and the performance of public universities in Kenya, and concluded that the operating environment moderates this relationship. The study recommends that vice-chancellors of public universities adopt innovativeness, pro-activeness, risk-taking, and self-renewal strategies with awareness of the external and internal operating environment, as these have a significant positive relationship with performance, and that the Ministry of Education and relevant policymakers institute reforms and organize forums that promote the adoption of intrapreneurship in public universities to improve overall organizational performance.

Corresponding Author:

Margaret K. Otolo

School of Business, Economics and Tourism, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya.

Email: margaretotolo@gmail.com

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2023 the Kenyan government unveiled a new funding model intended to ensure that eligible Kenyan students receive adequate financial support for university education and to revive public universities that would otherwise collapse because of financial challenges [1]. Nevertheless, the performance of most public universities has been on a downward trajectory, with deteriorating quality of education, research, and training facilities, a declining number of qualified academic staff, and rising academic malpractice, as reflected in the poor global rankings of Kenyan public universities.

Public universities in Kenya face an increasingly dynamic environment with challenges including resource constraints, the massification of education, rising expectations from learners and the public, and the need to develop skills for global markets. Despite these challenges, public universities are tasked with providing educational value to society while managing external issues in the operating environment, such as relationships with stakeholders [2]. In this study, the operating environment comprises dynamism, technological opportunities, and organizational growth. Dynamism relates to unpredictable changes caused by social or technical factors, and increased dynamism encourages the adoption of intrapreneurial activities to counter environmental change. Technological change affects creativity and innovation in public universities, requiring intensive adoption of intrapreneurship, and growth in new programmes, services, and markets requires universities to develop inventive thinking and practices; the flexibility and adaptability of a public university to external factors is therefore critical to the success of intrapreneurship [3].

The operating environment has been used as a moderating variable between intrapreneurship adoption and organizational performance. Intrapreneurship provides opportunities and solutions to challenges facing organizations and encompasses the development of new markets, managerial systems, processes, and know-how. Intrapreneurial strategies expose opportunities to create value and bring growth to an organization [4]; they are embedded in a managerial attitude through risk-taking, pro-activeness, innovativeness, and self-renewal [5], [6], [7], and an intrapreneurial public university adopts these strategies simultaneously [7]. To thrive in a dynamic environment while meeting the changing needs of its clients, a public university must adopt intrapreneurial strategies [8]. Against this background, this study sought to establish the moderating effect of the operating environment on the relationship between intrapreneurial strategies and the performance of public universities in Kenya.

1.1 Problem Statement

The Kenyan public university sector faces many challenges in its operating environment, including high enrolment, inadequate funding, inadequate teaching and learning resources, an acute shortage of professors, graduate unemployment, and low research output. Student enrolment has expanded massively while the number of professors has declined: with enrolment rising by over 31%, the professor-to-student ratio has worsened by over 27%, so that one professor teaches on average 563 students a year, compared with 275 in South Africa. Many Kenyan graduates are not productively employed, state funding to public universities has declined over the years, and donors have shunned funding them. These challenges can be addressed through the adoption of intrapreneurship in the form of innovativeness, pro-activeness, risk-taking, and self-renewal; however, the adoption of these strategies depends on how favourable the operating environment is, hence the need for this study.

1.2 Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the effect of innovativeness on the performance of public universities in Kenya;
2. To assess the effect of risk-taking on the performance of public universities in Kenya;
3. To analyse the effect of pro-activeness on the performance of public universities in Kenya;
4. To investigate the effect of self-renewal on the performance of public universities in Kenya; and
5. To determine the moderating effect of the operating environment on the relationship between intrapreneurial strategies and the performance of public universities in Kenya.

2. RELATED WORKS

This section presents the theories and empirical literature that guided the study.

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study drew on resource dependence theory, opportunity-based entrepreneurship theory, and entrepreneurial event theory.

2.1.1 Resource Dependence Theory

Resource dependence theory explains how organizations behave in response to their dependence on external resources, where “behaviour” refers to a broad range of activities, including actions and decision-making, as well as their outcomes, such as organizational structures that support intrapreneurship [9].

2.1.2 Opportunity-Based Entrepreneurship Theory

According to opportunity-based entrepreneurship theory, entrepreneurs exploit the opportunities created by change in the environment [10]. The intrapreneur perceives a change in the business environment and develops a new business [11], responding as a vigilant observer to change and seizing the opportunities it offers.

2.1.3 Entrepreneurial Event Theory

Moving from a comfortable situation to establishing a business entails a change in behaviour that leads to the uptake or rejection of a business idea; this is the entrepreneurial event, in which perceived desirability, perceived feasibility, and the propensity to act on an idea shape the intentions and behaviour of the (intra)preneur [12]. Entrepreneurial event theory therefore rests on two principles: the attractiveness and the feasibility of the business idea.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Innovativeness and Performance of Public Universities

H01: Innovativeness has no significant effect on the performance of public universities in Kenya.

Innovation involves the development and commercialization of new ideas into useful products [13], and innovativeness has proven to be crucial in dealing with the challenges facing organizations. Public universities are required to balance the provision of education with commercialization [14], a balance that can be achieved through innovativeness in the form of originality, openness to new ideas, and a commitment to change.

2.2.2 Risk-Taking and Performance of Public Universities

H02: Risk-taking has no significant effect on the performance of public universities in Kenya.

In intrapreneurial organizations, leaders do not punish employees who try and fail; instead, after failure, leadership actively seeks further bold suggestions for the benefit of the organization [15]. The ability to take risks enables public universities to access resources in the marketplace and build healthy relationships within the organization.

2.2.3 Pro-Activeness and Performance of Public Universities

H03: Pro-activeness has no significant effect on the performance of public universities in Kenya.

Pro-activeness enables public universities to become early movers with products and services, thereby gaining competitive advantage; it is important for public universities to shift to more proactive and continuous engagement with stakeholders to achieve competitive advantage and better performance.

2.2.4 Self-Renewal and Performance of Public Universities

H04: Self-renewal has no significant effect on the performance of public universities in Kenya.

Self-renewal is a transformational behaviour that creates flexibility and improves a public university's performance [16], and has been found to promote superior organizational performance.

2.2.5 Moderating Effect of the Operating Environment

H05: The operating environment has no moderating effect on the relationship between intrapreneurial strategies and the performance of public universities in Kenya.

The operating environment of public universities influences the adoption of intrapreneurial strategies. Frequent environmental scanning helps public universities understand the rules, standards, laws, regulations, and policies governing the sector, the cost of doing business, consumer demand, access to finance, and the behaviour of suppliers and employees [17]. A more hostile operating environment is associated with greater adoption of intrapreneurial concepts within organizations and thus with improved performance [18]. Based on the literature, the study used the operating environment as the moderating variable, with dynamism, technological opportunities, and organizational growth as its sub-variables.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive and explanatory research designs. The unit of analysis was the 36 public universities in Kenya, spread across several counties, which necessitated multi-stage random sampling; this yielded 20 public universities, from which Slovin's formula gave a sample size of 400 respondents. Primary data were collected using a questionnaire, and a pilot study was conducted to check face and content validity and Cronbach's alpha reliability [19]. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and percentages) were computed. The relationship between intrapreneurial strategies and performance without the moderator was tested by multiple regression (Equation 1):

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

where Y is the performance of public universities, β_0 is the constant, β_1 – β_4 are the coefficients, X_1 – X_4 are the intrapreneurial strategy variables (innovativeness, risk-taking, pro-activeness, and self-renewal), and ε is the error term. The moderating effect was tested using the approach recommended by Aiken and West [20] (Equation 2):

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 OE + \beta_3 X_i \cdot OE + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

where X_i is the composite index of intrapreneurial strategies, OE is the operating environment, β_1 and β_2 are their coefficients, and β_3 is the coefficient of the interaction term. The p-value of β_3 was compared with 0.05 to accept or reject the null hypothesis H05 that the operating environment has no moderating effect on the relationship between intrapreneurial strategies and the performance of public universities in Kenya.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Diagnostic Tests

Any regression model must satisfy the assumptions of multiple regression. Therefore, sample adequacy, confirmatory factor analysis, outliers, linearity, normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were tested for the study variables (Table 1).

Table 1. Diagnostic Test Results

No.	Test	Method	Decision criterion	Result	Decision
1	Sample adequacy	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO)	0.5 threshold	All variables surpassed 0.5	Sample adequate
2	Confirmatory factor analysis	Eigenvalues and communalities	Eigenvalues > 1; communalities > 0.4	Variables met threshold	No variables removed
3	Outliers	Cook’s distance	Values above 1 considered outliers	Values < 1 obtained	No outliers
4	Linearity	Pearson correlation coefficient	Values between –1 and 1	All variables significant at 0.05	Linearity present
5	Normality	Shapiro–Wilk test	$p > 0.05$	All conditions met	Data normally distributed
6	Multicollinearity	Variance inflation factor	1 to 10	All variables below 10	No multicollinearity
7	Homoscedasticity	Breusch–Pagan test	$p > 0.05$	$p = 0.50 > 0.05$	No heteroscedasticity

4.2 Regression without the Moderator

The composite index of the independent variables (innovativeness, risk-taking, pro-activeness, and self-renewal) was regressed on the performance of public universities in Kenya (Table 2).

Table 2. Model Summary: Intrapreneurial Strategies and Performance of Public Universities

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.758	0.575	0.569	0.4705

The adjusted R² of 0.569 indicates that the model explains 56.9% of the variation in the performance of public universities. These results agree with a study of state-owned enterprises in Zimbabwe, which concluded that intrapreneurial capabilities have a significant positive influence on performance, with greater agility promoting better public value delivery, service provision, customer satisfaction, and social and financial impact. Intrapreneurship has also been recognized as a sustainability approach that promotes creativity and improved performance, motivating firms to be innovative, proactive, risk-taking, and self-renewing [21].

Table 3. ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	85.402	4	21.351	96.445	0.000
Residual	63.092	285	0.221		
Total	148.494	289			

The ANOVA results in Table 3 are significant ($F = 96.445$, $p < 0.05$), showing that intrapreneurial strategies have a statistically significant relationship with the performance of Kenyan public universities. The coefficients are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Coefficients for Intrapreneurial Strategies and Performance of Public Universities

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	0.741	0.193		3.844	0.000
Innovativeness	0.146	0.059	0.144	2.493	0.013
Risk-taking	0.065	0.067	0.048	0.971	0.032
Pro-activeness	0.163	0.071	0.162	2.293	0.023
Self-renewal	0.446	0.066	0.480	6.801	0.000

The fitted prediction model is given in Equation (3):

$$Y = 0.741 + 0.146X_1 + 0.065X_2 + 0.163X_3 + 0.446X_4 \quad (3)$$

Where Y is the university performance composite index and X_1 – X_4 are innovativeness, risk-taking, pro-activeness, and self-renewal, respectively. The constant of 0.741 is the predicted performance when all intrapreneurial strategy variables are zero.

For H01, the regression coefficient for innovativeness ($\beta = 0.146$, $p = 0.013 < 0.05$) indicates that a one-unit increase in innovativeness increases public university performance by 0.146; innovativeness reflects a culture that supports experimentation and new ideas, products, technologies, and processes, helping organizations achieve competitive advantage. For H02, the coefficient for risk-taking ($\beta = 0.065$, $p = 0.032 < 0.05$) indicates that a one-unit increase in risk-taking increases performance by 0.065. With the looming burden of graduate unemployment, universities need to embrace risk-taking to expose students to real-life issues, and the establishment of new ventures requires considerable risk-taking [22]. For H03, the coefficient for pro-activeness ($\beta = 0.163$, $p = 0.023 < 0.05$) indicates that a one-unit increase in pro-activeness, holding the other variables constant, increases performance by 0.163. For H04, the coefficient for self-renewal ($\beta = 0.446$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that a one-unit change in self-renewal changes performance by 0.446; self-renewal, as business and corporate revitalization, is a critical concept for enhancing organizational performance.

4.3 Moderating Effect of the Operating Environment

Hypothesis H05, that the operating environment has no moderating effect on the relationship between intrapreneurial strategies and the performance of public universities in Kenya, was tested using two regression models (Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 5. Coefficients of the Moderation Models

Model	Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.523	0.364		97.512	0.025
	Intrapreneurial strategies	0.632	0.074	0.625	23.84	0.000
2	(Constant)	0.521	0.100			
	Intrapreneurial strategies	0.943	0.087	0.923	0.521	0.000
	Operating environment	-1.37	0.821	-1.20	18.72	0.000
	Intrapreneurial strategies × operating environment	0.760	0.643	0.754	14.26	0.002

Table 6. Model Summary and ANOVA of the Moderation Models

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. error	R ² change	F change	Sig. F change	F	Sig.
1	0.475	0.531	0.517	0.4394	–	22.763	0.000	27.64	0.000
2	0.625	0.734	0.694	0.0253	0.040	11.342	0.002	14.26 3	0.000

In the first model, intrapreneurial strategies were regressed on the performance of public universities, revealing a statistically significant association. In the second model, intrapreneurial strategies,

the operating environment, and an interaction term formed from the composite indices of intrapreneurial strategies and the operating environment were regressed on performance. The authors report that intrapreneurial strategies and the operating environment account for 62.5% of the variation in the performance of public universities and that the model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$):

$$Performance = 0.521 + 0.943 IS - 1.37 OE + 0.760 (IS \times OE) \quad (4)$$

where IS is the composite index of intrapreneurial strategies and OE is the operating environment. Intrapreneurial strategies are significant ($\beta = 0.943$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a positive effect on the performance of public universities; the operating environment is significant ($\beta = -1.37$, $p < 0.001$); and the interaction term is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.760$), so the operating environment moderates the association between intrapreneurial strategies and the performance of public universities.

The operating environment has been recognized as an input that improves firm performance, particularly in crisis conditions [23]. Through increased intrapreneurial activity, opportunities should be actively sought in the operating environment and optimally exploited, and transformation through self-renewal helps organizations in highly contested environments cope with market pressures [24]. In the public university sector, the operating environment must likewise be considered [22]; in such environments, the tried and tested may be replaced by the unknown, with a focus on risky and seemingly less certain ventures [25]. The results in Table 5 show that the operating environment significantly affects the adoption of intrapreneurial strategies and thereby improves public university performance; in a constantly changing business environment, organizations seek opportunities that stimulate growth and competitive advantage, which calls for the adoption of intrapreneurial strategies to penetrate new markets [21].

5. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the operating environment partially moderates the relationship between intrapreneurial strategies and the performance of public universities in Kenya.

5.1 Policy Implications

The vice-chancellors of public universities should create novel uses for existing resources to improve performance and should be cognizant of the dynamics of their operating environment before designing academic programmes, to ensure the employability of graduates. The Commission for University Education (CUE) should establish policies that create a favourable atmosphere for the adoption of intrapreneurship and should continuously review accredited university programmes to ensure quality. Other similar institutions should be aware of their operating environment and take appropriate action, and the Ministry of Education should provide oversight and assurance to ensure a conducive operating environment for improved performance.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

Kenyan public universities are few and well known to each other, which made respondents reluctant to provide information. In addition, there are many parameters of public university performance, and this study focused on only a few. The study used three entrepreneurship theories—opportunity-based entrepreneurship, resource dependence, and entrepreneurial event theories—and future research could consider others. The study adopted a positivist philosophy and multiple linear regression models; future research could use other research philosophies and methodologies. The variables in this study explained 57.5% of the variation in performance, leaving 42.5% to other factors, so future research could investigate other intrapreneurial strategies, performance factors, and moderators.

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Authors Contributions Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Margaret K. Otolo	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	
Stephen M. A. Muathe				✓	✓	✓		✓		✓				
Linda Kimencu	✓						✓			✓		✓		✓

C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

Conflict of Interest Statement

No conflict of interest.

Informed Consent

Not Applicable.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable.

Data Availability

This study draws on publicly available data. No new datasets were created.

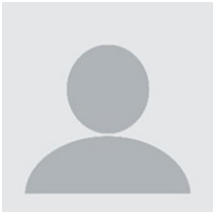
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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

	Margaret K. Otolo, is affiliated with the School of Business, Economics and Tourism at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya. Her academic and research interests include business management, organizational behavior, human resource management, and organizational performance. She is interested in exploring contemporary business challenges and developing effective management practices through academic research. Her scholarly interests focus on contributing to knowledge in business administration and supporting improved organizational effectiveness and sustainable development. Email: margaretotolo@gmail.com
	Stephen M. A. Muathe, is an academic affiliated with the School of Business, Economics and Tourism at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya. His research interests include strategic management, human resource management, entrepreneurship, innovation, and organizational performance. His academic work focuses on understanding management practices and their influence on organizational effectiveness and business growth. Through teaching and research, he contributes to the development of business and management knowledge in academic and professional contexts.
	Linda Kimencu, is affiliated with the School of Business, Economics and Tourism at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya. Her academic interests include business administration, strategic management, organizational development, and entrepreneurship. She is interested in examining business practices and management approaches that support organizational effectiveness and sustainable growth. Through her academic and research activities, she aims to contribute to the advancement of business knowledge and the understanding of contemporary organizational challenges.