

Customer Orientation and the Dual-Curriculum Secondary Schools' Performance in Mbale City, Uganda

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Abstract

The general objective of the study was to examine the influence of customer orientation on the Dual-Curriculum Secondary Schools' performance in Mbale City, Uganda. The study adopted an explanatory sequential research design with both quantitative and qualitative approaches which were used for purposes of triangulation. The target population was 157 and a sample of 128 classroom teachers and 3 Head teachers were selected using simple random sampling and census inquiry respectively. Data collection was majorly by closed-ended questionnaire and an interview guide. The validity of the instrument had a CVI of (.86) whereas the Cronbach's alpha coefficient score was (.917). The study was guided by the Dynamic Capabilities Theory. Quantitative data was analysed using regression, while qualitative data was analysed by thematic and content analyses. Regression coefficients attained for the study were positive and statistically significant; Customer orientation has a moderate positive statistically significant influence on schools' performance ($\beta=.503$, $p<.05$) reflecting that customer orientation improves Dual-Curriculum Secondary Schools' performance at 50.3%. Based on the above findings, it was concluded that customer orientation has a positive and statistically significant influence on the dual-curriculum secondary schools' performance in Mbale City. Finally, the study recommends that the Dual-Curriculum Secondary Schools need to be more customer oriented in terms collecting current information about the customers' needs, directing school practices towards creating students' satisfaction, and building stronger relationships with students among others.

Keywords: customer orientation, dual-curriculum secondary schools, school performance

School performance is considered to be one of the most important issues that should concern the management and administration of a school. School leaders need to analyse the factors which affect the levels of student enrolment and retention in their respective schools. Therefore, the school leaders should identify the factors that can lead to a decline in the population of the school and then take proactive actions (Jabbar, 2015). The continuous increase in competition among schools has also affected student enrolment and retention in schools. School managers need to identify the demands of the students and parents so that they can offer services that can satisfy their needs to the expectations (Selvakum, 2015). A student whose demands were satisfied was

discovered to be much willing to convince another student to also join the same school (Omboi & Mutali, 2011).

Presently, the secondary education sector in many sub-Saharan African countries are experiencing a robust increase in competition for customers (Aylward & Liang, 2020 as cited in Francis & Hawa, 2020). To sustain this competition, there is a need for these schools to improve the quality of service delivery. Previous research shows that among others, market orientation can be adopted as a strategy to understand customer needs and competitor analysis (Slater, et al., 2010). Market orientation has been identified as one of the most vital elements in determining an educational institution's performance, progress, and success, where efforts are directed towards matching the products / services with the customers' demands in the target market and which can be made possible by applying customer orientation (Mokoena & Dhurup, 2017).

Like in the other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, educational institutions in East Africa are facing several challenges as well such as increasing competition for educational services and decrease in government funding (Aylward & Liang, 2020 as cited in Francis & Hawa, 2020) among others. School performance in most cases majorly aims at achieving educational goals of a given society, and it also largely depends on the varying circumstances within the environment where the school is located, the availability of school resources meant to facilitate the activities and programmes, the management practices and strategies put in place, among others (Revisi & Lamas, 2015).

In Uganda today, school performance is considered to be an important aspect of the secondary education market. Much attention is given to the nature of the inputs reflected in terms of the grades attained at the previous level of education and outputs which are reflected in terms of grades attained by a student after completing a given level of education in a particular school. Besides the grades, schools also compete for students who have got the potential to pay school fees. School leaders also go ahead to look for donations and other forms of financial resources to enhance the acquisition of quality facilities meant to facilitate effective teaching-learning activities, and good academic staff to promote and sustain effective and efficient school performance both in the short- and long-run (Musisi & Genza, 2019).

The current study was guided by the Dynamic Capabilities Theory by Teece and Pisano (1994), which suggests that marketplaces are dynamic, rather than being stable in terms of heterogeneity with respect to organizations' resources available. It explains the capabilities by which an organization's resources are attained and allocated in the means that match the firm's market environment. Additionally, it highlights and considers the changes and advancements in the market environments which call for continuous adjustments according to the ever-changing environments in the market by putting into consideration of the dynamic perspective (Morgan et al., 2009).

In the current study, Market Orientation is viewed as a unique and highly valued factor that can help the Dual-Curriculum Secondary Schools (DCSSs) in

Mbale City to achieve greater performance in terms of increased student enrolment and retention. According to Narver and Slater (1990), market orientation relates to an organizational culture that efficiently and effectively generates essential behaviours for creating greater value for the customers in the target market, hence maintaining greater performance for the organization. In market orientation, much attention is given to the customers and an attempt is made to identify their aspirations. Thus, assisting a school manager in establishing the policies which can enhance the school's reputation, attract students and resources for the effective and efficient operation of the institution. It is also important to note that market orientation is an essential element during strategic planning in educational institutions (Arifin & Drysdale, 2015).

Under market orientation, the concepts such as customer orientation and competitor orientation involve all activities aimed at acquiring information about customers and competitors respectively, in the target market and its dissemination throughout the organization. Inter-functional coordination is another component which is also based on information about customers and competitors and involves the coordinated efforts of all members of the organization to create value for customers through improving services delivered to them. In brief, the three behavioural components of market orientation activities are based on the acquisition and dissemination of market information, and coordination of efforts to stimulate value for the customers of the organization (Felgueira & Gouveia, 2015).

In this study, school performance referred to the size of student enrolment and retention in the DCSSs in Mbale City; since most of such schools focus on enrolment and retention of students, implying that the bigger the number of students enrolled and retained, the higher the level of the financial capacity in terms of profit margins, growth, and development of the school. It is evident in the studies previously conducted by various scholars that school performance comprises of several dimensions and complex constructs that have been determined using a collection of indicators that could be financial or non-financial (Kraus, 2013, Stam, 2013; Wu & Zhao, 2009)

In this study, Dual-Curriculum Secondary Schools refer to secondary schools offering both theology and secular curriculum concurrently. For example, the teaching of the conventional curriculum (secular) and Islamic studies. DCSSs by their nature are expected to perform better than their non-dual-curriculum counterparts in terms of student enrolment and retention. This is because they are anticipated to have a steady financial base since they appeal to 3 categories of customers, i.e., those interested in theology, those interested in secular learning, and those interested in both. However, the reality on the ground is different from the expected situation for example some DCSSs in Mbale City are experiencing low student enrolment of 152 students, accompanied with low levels of student retention of less than 90% (School A enrolment report, 2019). In school B, the enrolment was 277 students at the beginning of 2020 with a low

retention of less than 90% implying that the situation is not very different from that of school A (School B enrolment report, 2019).

Recent studies have reflected that there exists a positive relationship between market orientation and school performance in terms of student enrolment and retention. For example, Webster et al.,’s (2013) study found out that there is a positive effect of market orientation on business schools’ performance in the USA. Mokoena’s (2019) study similarly established that market orientation and organizational performance within the Southern African universities were positively correlated. This implies that if market orientation principles are applied to educational institutions well, higher levels of productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency can be achieved hence improving the level of school performance.

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, DCSSs are expected to perform better than their non-dual-curriculum counterparts in terms of student enrolment, student retention, financial asset-base, and the ability to attract, motivate, and retain the best staff. This is because they are presumed to have a firm financial base since they appeal to 3 categories of customers. Moreover, according to the pilot study that was undertaken by the researcher in August 2021, it was established that a lot has been done to enhance the performance of DCSSs in Mbale City, such as engaging in aggressive marketing through the use of various marketing strategies for example advertisements on the local radio stations within the region, promotions such as offering free admissions, giving bursaries to best students in every class, word-of-mouth advertisement, among others.

Despite all the above efforts, it appears that all is not well regarding the performance of DCSSs in Mbale City. Student enrolment is continuously decreasing as compared to the years before 2016 accompanied by low levels of student retention in the schools (e.g., School A enrolment report, 2019). If the above conditions continue, probably the performance of DCSSs in Mbale City is expected to be negatively affected as well as the chances of long-term survival be minimised thus leading to the collapse of some DCSSs. The researcher wonders whether the deteriorating DCSSs Performance in Mbale City is due to limited customer orientation which makes it difficult to identify the potential customers in the current competitive environment. Empirical studies have been conducted on customer orientation and performance dominantly at higher education and little efforts have been put towards linking customer orientation and secondary school performance, the researcher had encountered no study on customer orientation particularly in Mbale City in Uganda. Therefore, this study was aimed at filling that gap by analysing the influence of customer orientation on the DCSSs Performance in Mbale City.

Literature Review

The concept customer orientation comprises all activities that are aimed at acquiring information about potential customers to facilitate the understanding of the target markets’ / customers’ present and future needs and utilize the

available resources to create greater value for the potential customers. The institution must respond to customer demands based on the collected and distributed information (Hult et al., 2005). According to Singh (2009), customer orientation is the key element of the market because of its major focus on the customers. The customer orientation component necessitates an understanding of the customers' demands to facilitate the process of creating greater products and services to satisfy the customers' demands as compared to the competitors in the target market. Therefore, for institutions to be customer-oriented, they need to collect information about customers' needs and wants to create greater value that can match with the customers' demands both in the present and in the future.

Mokoena (2019) analysed the role of market orientation components such as customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination in the predication of performance of universities. A cross-sectional survey was employed, and the target population was limited to only the academic staff using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. The study instruments with a five-point Likert scale starting from strongly disagree to strongly agree were used. The findings of the study revealed that market orientation results in improvement of the performance of the university. Therefore, the study recommended that universities need to develop a culture that enables them to respond to uncertainties in the external environment. The study applied the use of a non-probability convenience sampling technique while the current study applied the use of simple random sampling technique. The study was conducted in university setting while the current study was conducted in the secondary school setting in Mbale City.

Mokhtaran and Komeilian's (2016) study aimed at exploring the effect of customer orientation on the performance of Dana Insurance Company where they considered the intermediate role of quality service management and customer relations. During the study, a cross-sectional descriptive survey design was used and primary data was collected using literature review and the questionnaires. The findings of the study revealed that customer orientation has a positive significant effect on the financial performance, marketing performance, and institutional performance of Dana Insurance Company. The results also indicated that customer orientation also has a positive significant effect on the management of customer relationships and quality services of the insurance company. The study focused on customer orientation and performance of an insurance company while the current study focused on customer orientation and the performance of the secondary schools in Mbale City.

According to Hashim et al. (2011) in their study of antecedents and consequences of market orientation in non-profit institutions in Malaysia, the major purpose was to explore the customer orientation antecedents and their effects on non-profit making organizations like higher educational institutions. During the study, respondents were the students who were currently enrolled in a Malaysian public university and these were randomly given questionnaires of the five-point Likert scale extending from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The

study revealed that there is a positive link between customer orientation and institutional performance. The study focused on students in the higher educational institutions as the respondents while the current study focused on the academic staff and administrators as the respondents. The study was also carried out from higher education while the current study was conducted from a secondary school setting.

According to Santos et al. (2020), in study of the relationship between market orientation and financial performance mediated with innovative capability, they employed a cross-sectional survey questionnaire that followed an exploratory stage which aimed at exploring the link between customer orientation and financial performance. The results of the study reflected that companies that are customer-oriented tend to experience higher levels of financial performance. The above study aimed at establishing the relationship between market orientation and financial performance while the current study aimed at examining the influence of market orientation on secondary schools in Mbale City.

Methodology

The study adopted an explanatory sequential research design with both quantitative and qualitative approaches and these were used for purposes of triangulation. The target population was 157 and a sample of 128 classroom teachers and 3 Head teachers were selected using simple random sampling and census inquiry respectively. Data collection majorly was by use of closed-ended 5 Likert scale questionnaire for the classroom teachers and an interview guide for the Head teachers. The validity of the questionnaire was ensured by the help of 3 experts from the Department of Educational Management and Administration to evaluate the questions. The experts were asked to comment on each question as relevant, irrelevant, or needs improvement and the Content Validity Index of the instruments at 0.86. The reliability of the instruments was established by pre-testing the instruments in one of the DCSSs in Iganga Municipality, because the environment was presumed to be similar to that of the DCSSs in Mbale City and eleven (11) classroom teachers were considered and the questionnaires were administered to them. Then the Cronbach's alpha coefficient through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to analyse and determine the reliability of the instruments and the reliability score of the instruments was 0.917. Quantitative data was analysed using regression while qualitative data was analysed by thematic and content analysis. The study upheld confidentiality, informed consent anonymity respect of rights and originality.

Findings

This study analysed the influence of customer orientation on the DCSSs' performance in Mbale City. In this, it focussed on the influence of customer orientation on the DCSSs' performance i.e., student enrolment and retention. Questionnaires were administered to 128 classroom teachers and the questionnaires returned were 106 indicating a questionnaire return rate of about 83%.

Demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristics of the respondents that were obtained in the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1:
Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Description	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	78	73.6
	Female	28	26.4
Highest Qualification	Diploma	27	25.5
	Degree	59	55.7
	Postgraduate Diploma	11	10.4
	Masters	9	8.5
Period of Service	1-5 years	51	48.1
	6-10 years	38	35.9
	11 years	17	16.0
	Total	106	100.0

Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 1 reveals that the study was comprised of all genders despite the fact that the male gender dominated in the participation of the study that is to say, 78 (73.6%) of the respondents were male and 28 (26.4%) of them were female. The table also reveals that majority of the respondents 55.7% were Bachelor's degree holders followed by Diploma holders comprising 25.5%; Postgraduate diploma respondents were 11 taking 10.4%, and 9 respondents held Master's degrees comprising 8.5% of the study sample. Meanwhile, 38 (35.9%) respondents indicated having served the DCSSs for a period between 6-10 years, while 17 (16.0%) of them had worked for a period of 11 years and above.

Responses on Student Enrolment

This section deals with the findings obtained on the DCSSs performance in terms of perceived student enrolment in Mbale City as presented in Table 2. The findings are interpreted cumulatively by combining the strongly disagreed with agreed; and the strongly agreed with agreed.

According to results in Table 3, 34 (32.1%) respondents disagreed that their schools had student enrolment that matched with the school expectations; and 18 (17.0%) were not sure of this claim. However, contrary to this claim, 54 respondents (50.9%) had an agreement based on this fact. Thirty respondents (28.3%) disagreed that their schools' student enrolment matches with the school staff available; 15 (14.2%) were not sure of this claim; and contrary to this claim,

the 61 respondents (57.5%) had an agreement based on this fact. Thirty-three (31.1%) respondents disagreed that their schools' student enrolment matches with

Table 2

Responses on Student Enrolment

ITEMS	SD f (%)	D f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)
The student enrolment matches with the school expectations	18 (17.0)	16(15.1)	18(17.0)	33 (31.1)	21(19.8)
The student enrolment matches the staff Available	13 (12.3)	17 (16.0)	15(14.2)	40(37.7)	21(19.8)
The student enrolment matches with the classroom space available	10(9.4)	23(21.7)	14(13.2)	34(32.1)	25(23.6)
The student enrolment matches with the instructional materials available	15 (14.2)	23(21.7)	12(11.3)	32(30.2)	24(22.6)
The student enrolment matches with the space available for co-curricular activities	11(10.4)	23(21.7)	6(5.7)	40(37.7)	26(24.5)
The student enrolment matches with space for students' residence	8(7.5)	22(20.8)	14(13.2)	36(34.0)	26(24.5)

Source: Researcher (2022)

the classroom space available; 14 (13.2%) were unsure; while 59 (55.7%) of them were in agreement with this fact. Thirty-eight respondents (35.9%) disagreed that their schools' student enrolment matches with the instructional materials available; 12 (11.3%) were not sure of this claim; while 56 (52.8%) of them had an agreement based on this fact. Thirty-four respondents (32.1%) disagree that their schools' student enrolment matches with the space available for co-curricular activities; 06 (5.7%) were not sure of this claim; while on the contrary, 66 (62.2%) respondents were in agreement with this fact. Thirty respondents (28.3%) disagreed that their schools' student enrolment matches with space for students' residence; 14 (13.2%) of them were not sure; while 62 (58.5%) respondents were in agreement with this fact.

Responses on Customer Orientation

This section deals with the findings obtained on the Customer Orientation in Mbale City as presented in Table 3; which reveals that 20 (18.9%) respondents disagreed that their schools regularly collect information about students' needs; 10 (9.4%) of them were; not sure of this claim; while contrary to this claim, 76 (71.7%) respondents had an agreement based on this fact. Fifteen (14.2%) respondents disagreed that their schools' practices are geared directly towards

creating students' satisfaction; 17 (16.0%) were not sure; while contrary to this claim, 74 respondents (69.8%) were in agreement with this fact. Twelve (11.3%) respondents disagreed that their schools regularly assess the levels of students'

Table 3

Responses on Customer Orientation

ITEMS	SD F (%)	D F (%)	N F (%)	A F (%)	SA F (%)
The school regularly collects of information about students' needs	11(10.4)	09(8.5)	10(9.4)	42(41.5)	32(30.2)
The school practices are geared directly towards creating students' satisfaction	04(3.8)	11(10.4)	17(16.0)	48(45.3)	26(24.5)
The school regularly assesses the level of students' satisfaction	05(4.7)	07(6.6)	17(16.0)	59(55.7)	18(17.0)
The school makes effort to build stronger relationship with students	03(2.8)	09(8.5)	09(8.5)	58(54.7)	27(25.5)
The school recognizes the existence of different groups in the market	06(5.7)	20(18.9)	18(17.0)	47(44.3)	15(14.2)
The school always pays attention to the feedback from the students	06(5.7)	10(9.4)	18(17.0)	51(48.1)	21(19.8)
The school devises a way forward after getting feedback from the students	03(2.8)	12(11.3)	10(9.4)	63(59.4)	18(17.0)
The school sacrifices some short-term gains for students' benefits	07(6.6)	08(7.5)	16(15.1)	58(54.7)	17(16.0)

Source: Researcher (2022)

satisfaction; 17 (16.0%) of them were not sure; while 77 (72.7%) respondents were in agreement with this fact. Twelve (11.3%) respondents disagreed that their schools make effort to build a stronger relationship with students; 09 respondents (8.5%) were not sure of this claim; while 85 (80.2%) respondents had an agreement based on this fact. Twenty-six (24.6%) respondents disagreed that their schools recognize the existence of different groups in the market; 18 respondents (17.0%) were not sure; and 62 (58.5%) were in agreement with this fact. Sixteen (15.1%) disagreed that their schools always pay attention to the feedback from the students; 18 (17.0%) of them were not sure of this claim; while 72 (67.8%) were in agreement. Fifteen (14.1%) respondents disagreed that their schools devise ways forward after getting feedback from the students; 10 (9.4%) of them

were not sure; however, 81 (76.4%) had an agreement based on this fact. Fifteen (14.1%) respondents disagreed that their schools sacrifice some short-term gains for students' benefits; 16 (15.1%) were not sure; while 75 (70.7%) of them were in agreement with this fact.

In relation to the above findings, customer orientation is key in influencing the performance of DCSSs in terms of student enrolment because it helps in the understanding of the customers' demands in order to facilitate the process of creating better services to satisfy their demands. In an interview conducted with the Head teacher of school A, he emphasized that: *"It is important for the school administration to identify the students' needs in order to maintain and improve the quality of services offered accordingly"*. He went ahead and noted that in his school, identification of learners' needs is done by organizing meetings for students' leaders to share freely with the school administration about the services offered by the school. *"Addressing the students is also being done in order to identify their needs especially those in boarding which is being done by gathering them in the main hall in the evening once in a while"*.

In another interview with the Head teacher of school C, the situation wasn't different from that of school A, He also pointed out that;

The school makes efforts to identify the students' needs as much as possible using various strategies such as conducting meetings with students' leaders, organizing general meetings for students especially those in the boarding section, and organizing parents' meetings to share their views with the school administration. Then after such meetings, the school administration calls for departmental meetings to discuss the matters raised in the various meetings conducted with the aim of identifying the customers' needs (students and parents) to develop ways of responding to the demands accordingly.

The school administration does all that in order to establish and understand the students' needs with the aim of maintaining and improving the quality of the services offered, and in order to improve the school's performance in terms of student enrolment and student retention. In line with the above findings, Singh (2009) also noted that customer orientation is the key element because of its major focus on the customers. Customer orientation necessitates an understanding of the customers' demands in order to facilitate the process of creating greater products and services to satisfy the customers' demands as compared to the competitors in the target market. Therefore, for the institutions to be customer-oriented, they need to collect information about the customers' needs and wants in order to create greater value that can match with the customers' demands both in the present and in the future.

The above findings of the current study can be interpreted in terms of Dynamic Capability Theory which emphasizes that marketplaces are dynamic rather than being stable. This creates the need for the schools and other organizations to be customer-oriented because the customers' demands keep on

changing depending on the demands of the time hence making the target market to be unstable as highlighted by the theory. This indicates that the DCSSs in Mbale City need to be customer-oriented just like any other organisation in order to understand the changing demands of the customers in the target market.

Regression analysis was also adopted to examine whether Customer Orientation has a statistically significant influence on DCSSs' performance in Mbale City. Results of linear regression analysis are presented in the Table 4.

Table 4

Regression Coefficients for Customer Orientation and DCSSs' Performance

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	14.133	4.175		3.385	.001
	Customer Orientation	.919	.155	.503	5.931	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Dual-curriculum Secondary schools' performance

The results in Table 4.28 revealed a regression coefficient of $\beta=.503$. This finding revealed that Customer Orientation has a moderate and positive statistically significant influence at ($\beta=.503$, $p<.05$) on DCSSs' performance in Mbale City according to Cohen's (1988) scale. Implying that customer orientation accounts for 50.3% of the changes in DCSSs' performance in Mbale City, other factors remaining constant. Therefore, null hypothesis H01 that "There is no statistically significant influence of Customer Orientation on DCSSs' Performance in Mbale City", was rejected.

In line with the findings, Mokhtaran and Komeilian (2016) conducted a study aimed at exploring the effect of customer orientation on the performance of Dana insurance company. The findings of the study also revealed that customer orientation has a positive significant effect on the financial performance, marketing performance, and institutional performance of Dana insurance company. The results also indicated that customer orientation also has a positive significant effect on the management of customer relationships and quality services of Dana insurance company. Mokhtaran and Komeilian (2016) findings are not very much different from the study conducted by Hashim et al. (2011) about the antecedents and consequences of market orientation in non-profit institutions in Malaysia, where the major purpose was to explore the customer orientation antecedents and the effects in non-profit-making organizations like the higher educational institutions. Their study also revealed that there is a positive link between customer orientation and institutional performance.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that Customer Orientation has a moderate and positive statistically significant influence at ($\beta=.503$, $p<.05$) on DCSSs' performance in Mbale City; implying that increase in customer

orientation results into an increase in DCSSs' performance in Mbale City, other factors remaining constant.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, some recommendations were made and these include;

DCSSs should improve customer-orientated practices such as regular collection of information about the students' needs, regular assessment of the levels of students' satisfaction, making effort to build stronger relationships with students, among others in order to improve on their performance in terms of student enrolment.

Sensitization of the staff members by the school administrators about the customer-oriented programmes within the school should be done for example during data analysis it was identified 16.0% of the respondents were not sure of whether their school practices are geared directly towards creating students' satisfaction.

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