

Implementing Practical Marketing Strategy for Township Schools

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ABSTRACT The study investigated the cause of decline in enrolment in technical schools in South Africa with the aim of designing a practical implementation plan (PIP) to counteract the trend. This was a case study using a qualitative research approach involving the school admissions committees, members of the school management team and students. As part of the process of developing a PIP, the study explored the relationship amongst parents, students, governors, the community and nature of their accountability. The data was collected using interview schedules consisting of unstructured and structured questions. The findings indicated that the main reasons for the reduction in student enrolment were the split of the school structure into the further education and training (FET) and Senior (junior secondary) school phases which resulted in a lack of resources and ill-discipline on the part of teachers and students – occasioned by traveling long distances to and from the technical schools for trade practical work. A PIP was developed, but did not get to the implementation stage as the schools quickly degenerated into the status of an Education Action Zone (EAZ) School due to poor performance. Further, some recommendations are put forward which could assist the schools improve its performance.

INTRODUCTION

As the wind of democratic change swept across the South African educational landscape from the early 1990s, most rural technical schools in South African came under the threat of closing down due to declining enrolments. More and more students started to leave rural schools in favor of schools located in the suburbs of the major cities (Coleman 1994). Tikly and Mabogane (1996) stated that marketisation is understood as the penetration of market forces and the 'commodity into education system. This implied that the introduction of enrolment-driven funding criteria has been intended to encourage competition between schools for learners and thereby help maintain standards. Woolman and Fleish (2006a) observed that marketing a school can be traced from some of the historical, economic, political and constitutional antecedents that led to the existing de facto policy of school choice, the heart of this are the three pieces of enabling legislation-the National Education Policy Act (NEPA) which regulate an express intent to 'co-ordinate parental preferences', the South African School Act (SASA) which enables school governing bodies to charge fees and thereby creates an incentives to admit as many full fee-paying learners as the school can accommodate. Further, the Employment of Educators Act (EEA) and Educators Labor Regulation

Council (ERLC) resolutions-creates additional incentives for principals to compete for bums in seats by tying promotion posts o the number of learners who attend the school. However, these researchers aver that school choice was not the state's adoption of a conscious and deliberate policy (Woolman and Fleish 2006b). Msila (2009) posits that after the demise of apartheid black parents explored their choice options further by securing enrolment places for their children in suburban, former white school or ex Model C schools (these are formerly white schools that were funded by the government (80%) and partly by the parents (20%). Lethoko (2001), Maile (2004), Msila (2009), and Bisschof and Koebe (2005) argued that the customers (parents) shop around for better schools and when they are not happy with what they have in township schools, they take their business outside the township schools. Further, Maile (2004) contented that parents complain about the declining quality of education their children receive in rural or township schools, above all, learners migrate to better schools to acquire skills that will make them earn more and be economically empowered in future (Woolman and Fleish 2006; Msila 2009). It has been found out by Msila (2005) that majority of the parents hunt for schools with high pass rates; they look at education and success in economic terms. In general, parents wanted quality education for their children and, in pursuing this

objective, ended up taking their children to the best schools in the cities away from rural areas. Many schools in rural areas also started to lose a lot of money in the form of government subsidies due to low learner enrolments, thereby, becoming even more disadvantaged than before.

Motivation for the Study

The school that forms the subject of this research paper is a rural technical school (catering for technical subjects) extending from grade 8 to 12. In 1998, the Department of Education (DoE) informed the management of the school to convert the school to a Further Education and Training (FET) institution (only grades 10-12). The school was, thus, subsequently converted as from 1998. Some parents, students, teachers and members of the school governing body felt that proper consultations and arrangements had not been met. In particular, the teachers felt insecure because redeployment of teacher, on masse, was also taking place at the same time. Grades 8 and 9 classes were transferred to another school, which was previously a primary school. It was inconvenient for staff, as they were now required to travel from one school to another to honor teaching periods. The relationship between the two schools soured as some of the teachers were declared in excess.

A fourth problem emerged of the feeder school advising students and parents (especially those who achieved good results) to enroll at other secondary schools than the school under study. Many parents followed this advice and secured places for their children elsewhere. In the process, the number of students at the newly established FET school decreased drastically. Academically, the school began to under-perform, and achieved below 20 percent at the end of 1998. A practical implementation plan to redeem the school was developed but could not be implemented immediately. The district provided intervention through regular school visits by institutional development and support officers.

In this regard, Hoy and Miskel (1989) recommended that the school establish marketing roles that will make way for the organization to manage the uncertainties from a turbulent environment, creating internal roles that will span organizational boundaries to link such schools with elements in the external environment. This is an important strategy for coping with uncertainty and dependency.

Research Objectives

The present study investigated marketing strategies that could assist a school in rural area to increase its enrolment, better its public image, and ascertain how these strategies could be sustained in the very long-term. More specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- ♦ identify practical marketing strategies that could be of strategic importance to the school in bettering its public image and improve its enrolment profile.
- ♦ explore the relationships among parents, students, the school governing body, education official, institutions, the community, and the business sector with specific reference to accountability towards the school;
- ♦ explore ways in which various stakeholders, internal and external to the school, could improve conditions (associated with decreased enrollment) within the school; and
- ♦ analyse the school development plan as an adequate tool for marketing the school.

Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

- ♦ What practical marketing strategies could the school implement to bolster its public image and improve its enrolment profile?
- ♦ What kind of relationships exist among parents, students, the school governing body, educational institutions, the community, and the business sector with regard to accountability towards the school?
- ♦ How important did the various stakeholders perceive their respective roles in the implementation of the school's marketing strategies?
- ♦ Did the school's development plan contain the salient elements necessary for effectively marketing the school with regard to its needs?

Overall, however, the school needed to explain its actions to all its stakeholders and those who were concerned with matters concerning education and the school. Failure to satisfy those to whom the organization was accountable may have attracted specific actions and sanctions.

METHODOLOGY

The research methods followed in this study are briefly outlined below.

Research Design

This was a case study involving one rural technical school, recently converted into an FET institution.

Sampling Design

The purposive sampling technique was used. This technique required that the data to be collected about the phenomena under investigated be informant-rich.

The admissions committee, school management team members and students of the participating school were the rich sources who provided information that led to the formulation of practical strategies to market their school. More specifically, the research sample comprised six members of the admissions committee, seven members of the school management team and ten students from each class (from 10 classes of grade 10) of the grade tens as these students were from feeder schools.

Data Collection

Interviews and direct observation were used as instruments for determining the practical strategies which the school could implement. The research was human-as-instrument for the collection and analysis of data as this approach fitted well with the instruments that the researchers had selected. Maykutt and Morehouse (1994) viewed that human-as-instrument means that it is the person with all of her /his skills, experience, background and knowledge as well as biases which is the primary, if not the exclusive source of all data collection and analysis. This implied that the human investigator can explore the typical response in ways that are not possible for any instrument which is constructed in advance of the beginning of the study.

Through direct observations the researchers attempted to enter the lives of the participants, to in-dwell and view the situation under study as data collection progressed. The participant observer asked questions such as: what happened here? What is important to these people? How will they describe the situation? The task is one of listening hard and keenly observing. Subsequent observations were guided by initial discovery.

From the ethical point of view participants in the present study were assured that all information would be treated as confidential and would remain anonymous. To strengthen the validity of the study the researchers set out to establish a strong chain of evidence coming from different research questions.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed qualitatively. The process of qualitative data analysis is one of culling or constructing meaning from words and actions of participants (Maykutt and Morehouse 1994). The search for meaning is accompanied by identifying the smaller units of meaning in the data, which it must be understandable without additional information, except for the knowledge of the researchers' focus of enquiry. Strauss (1996) observed that sub-categories specify a category by denoting information such as when, where, why and how a phenomenon is likely to occur. Sub-categories, like categories, also have properties and dimensions. For instance, one sub-category of parents' commitment is parent involvement. It explained how parents are responsible. Responsibility of parents is classified according to the specific properties that demonstrate the manner in which parents are responsible or involved, for example, accountability, and parent's expertise.

RESULTS

Eleven broad themes or topics were identified from the field notes (interviews and direct observations). The data analysis was primarily an inductive process of organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among categories. Building patterns in meaning, served as the framework, for reporting the findings and organizing the report. Some topics fitted into more than one category and other topics were not central to the research problem. Some categories fitted into more than one pattern. How the meaning of patterns emerged depended on both the content of each response and the comparison made to the context of the study.

Marketing Strategies for a School

The information in Table 1 was then organized into higher order categories, resulting in

Table 1: Marketing strategies for a school

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Categories and Sub-categories</i>
1. <i>Decrease in Enrolment</i>	1.1 The split 1.1.1 Sharing of resources 1.1.2 Trade offered elsewhere 1.1.3 Ill discipline
2. <i>Parents' Funding the School</i>	1.2 Poor performance 1.2.1 Education action zone (EAZ) 2.1 More students increase financial resource 2..1.1 Responsibility of parents/Customers 2.1.2 Parents pay school fees 2.1.3 Fundraising 2.1.4 Matric farewell, Aids day, long and short trips, Concerts, cultural day 2.1.5 Registration increase 2.1.6 Rent payment by hawkers, churches
3. <i>Parents' Responsibilities</i>	3.1 Commitment 3.1.1 Parent involvement 3.1.2 Accountability 3.1.3 Disciplined 3.1.4 Parental expertise
4. <i>Teacher Development Programmes</i>	4.1 Financial management workshop 4.1.1 Development plan 4.2 Conflict management workshop 4.2.1 Building relationship 4.2.2 Aim of marketing 4.2.3 Necessity of funding 4.2.4 Equip workshop 4.2.5 Curriculum expertise
5. <i>Students' Responsibilities</i>	5.1 Punctuality 5.1.1 Morning and afternoon 5.1.2 Wearing proper uniform 5.1.3 Being disciplined 5.1.4 Dedicated 5.1.5 Return any book that belongs to the school
6. <i>Strategic Planning</i>	6.1 Provision of workshop 6.1.1 Library 6.1.2 Objective of marketing 6.1.3 Planning by committees 6.1.4 Young energetic educator 6.1.5 Extra classes on Saturday
7. <i>Promotion at Feeder School</i>	7.1 Promoting product of the school 7.1.1 Learner excellence 7.1.2 Technical subject expertise 7.1.3 Different sporting codes
8. <i>Commitment</i>	8.1 High pass rate 8.1.1 Effort of stakeholder 8.1.2 80 Computer and fax machines 8.1.3 Security 8.1.4 Maintenance
9. <i>Dedication</i>	9.1 Punctuality 9.1.1 Honouring classes 9.1.2 No loitering 9.1.3 Policy on admission
10. <i>Decision-making</i>	10.1 Joint effort 10.1.1 Feedback 10.1.2 Parental and students' roles 10.1.3 Donors 10.1.4 Control of funds 10.1.5 Utilisation of funds
11. <i>Accountability</i>	11.1 Accountability to stakeholders 11.1.1 Accountability to · Parents · Business sector · Government · Community, · The profession governing teachers

NB: The following code represent the following:

1. (T/MHSL-5/T/MHST-3-6) interview transcript, MHL-is the name of the school-5 represent a paper

the following categories as they stated the relationship of meaning of topics that was derived from the various segments of data.

- ♦ More students increase the financial resource base of a school
- ♦ Commitment
- ♦ Promoting product of the school
- ♦ Punctuality
- ♦ Joint effort

These categories represent the flexibility of marketing activities. Accordingly, parents should be able to identify the school as one with the potential and capacity to meet their children's educational needs and aspirations. Their choice of the school for their children will depend on this.

Overall, the findings of the present study are presented below in a summary form, according to the research objectives.

Practical Marketing Strategies

The split of the school had resulted in a lack of resources, ill-discipline of teachers and students, students traveling long distances, poor performance by students resulting in the school being classified as an Education Action Zone (EAZ) school. The teachers were threatened with redeployment. Students identifying the following aspects (like variety of school uniforms, different sporting code, debate, high pass rate, clean surrounding, resources dedicated teacher, discipline, matric balls, computer lab, extra classes over holidays, invited guests, parents evening, reputation of the school, fund raising activities, behavior of students, security) as factors that might attract them to a particular school. The school management team mentioned: joint decision making, enough resources, support from senior manager, security, discipline among themselves, and enough support from Institutional Development and Support Officer.

The admission committee mentions the following practical aspects: policy on admissions, admission forms distributed early to schools, and open days, support from other teachers when prospective students submitted evidence of their progress, especially, for new students from feeder schools.

The Relationship among the Stakeholders

The researchers noted from the direct observations of the various activities of the school

that it needed collaboration of all the stakeholders to be part of the decision making processes so that it will be easy for the best practical marketing strategy to be implemented. It was up to the school to identify its core needs in order to satisfy its clients. Both the teachers and the students were asked whether parents attended school meetings, and the response was 'it depends on the purpose of the meeting or what is in the agenda. Some students said 'only when they came to collect our school performance reports.

Overall, the school seemed to believe that general school meetings during the week-ends would not be a possible solution in encouraging collaborations as most parents were assumed busy. The school felt that it supported parents by holding grade-level meetings where stakeholders were invited to share and be part of decision maker within the school. It is up to the school to invite and engage local business to discuss how they can assist the school, invite universities to expose students to their programs and different opportunities they had on offer for students from different socio background, extent the school needs to the community and other parents as they might have other expertise that can be of great help to the school.

Perceptions of the Stakeholder in Implementing the School's Marketing Strategies

The third research objective was to explore the ways in which the various stakeholders, internal and external to the school, could redress the conditions associated with declining enrolment at the school. All the stakeholders, especially, parents, felt that they were supposed to be part of some of the daily activities that took place within the school. This was evident during a parent meeting when the principal was talking about discipline and parents would always responded by saying 'But we were not told in time,' or 'we did not receive the information in time'.

Some of the parent members of the school governing body pledged to assist with cleaning of classes and the school ground, mending the school fence and working in the school gardens. There was also the case of 80 computers that had been donated, but were not installed; some computers were not working properly. Some of

the parents indicated that they were prepared to assist in raising money for maintenance and repair of the broken computers making them available for use by the students. It is also important that the strategic plan of school must be made available to all relevant stakeholders. Parents felt that the school does not engage them in critical decision making but only when they experience problem within the school. The school through its general meeting it can share its intentions and how are they going to achieve that, asking for suggestion from parents, and creating opportunities for member of the community to volunteer and share their expertise with school.

The School Development Plan as a Tool for Marketing the School

The fourth and final research objective was to analyze if the school development plan as a sufficient and appropriate tool for the school's marketing strategy.

The school development plan was not implemented at the time in which it was expected to, due to the fact that the school suddenly became an underperforming school, Education Action Zone. The focus was more on improving teaching and learning, especially grade 12 classes. Further, the teachers were now more engaged with cluster meetings. One of the delays for the plan to be implemented was the employment of new teachers to meet the curriculum needs of the school. Above all, some of the teachers never cared much about what was going on within the school. For instance, when they were asked this question 'do you have any idea about the school development plan? Some responded that they did not know and' "I do not think I have time for that" "I have portfolio activities" "I do not think it is for me, I am new here, I had never heard other teachers talking about." The most critical factor was that majority of the school management team lack practical marketing skills as that was some of the reasons that delayed the implementation of the school development plan.

From the look of things the mind sets of the teachers were supposed to be changed first before implementation took place. The school management system felt that the strategic plan had the intended goals and objectives that needed to be accomplished.

DISCUSSION

Hallinger and Hech (1998) argued that the active involvements of stakeholders are a positive tool of a successful school. Further, the literature indicated that planning needs to take place by considering aims, beliefs and the core needs of the school so that the school development plan align with what the school needs to sell to its prospective clients. Bisshoff and Koebe (2005) posited that learners are attracted to schools with inviting environments which are more easily attained with sufficient funds than without.

The principal as the manager of both of team of teachers and students must constantly seek ways to involve the community and link must be formed with other schools to promote and initiate transformation.

In this regard, De Almeida (1989) stated that everything he had read about successful school indicated that vision needed be shared by the staff, students, parents and the community. The most important elements of a strategic approach to external relations is to build partnerships with stakeholders if the principal shares school vision with all stakeholders. They will ultimately and surely support and help in achieving the desired goals. The strategic planning approach is the responsibility of the principal and the school management team but the implementation of decisions will need the stakeholders to be informed so that there is ownership of responsibilities, from management to students.

The school can also form relationships with institutions of higher learning, so that the school is properly guided what is expected of the students wishing to proceed to tertiary education. The school can also ask for donations in the form of learning support materials from further higher education institutions.

Another point related to the importance of development plans. In this regard, the schools needs to scan its environment with a view to, knowing as much about the environment as possible including the changing behaviors of clients. As such, the school will be more effective if stakeholders' needs and interests are taken into consideration, against the backdrop of the school's mission statement. A development plan included all the areas of the school, and has the benefit of being the most practical and cheap marketing strategy for an organization that does

not need much financial capital to promote itself. Such a school would not need a billboard to inform the public about the events within the school. To achieve this, the principal and stakeholders should set standards that will act as a guideline for change, and for enhancing the culture of teaching and learning. Rogers and Smith (1995) emphasized the point that the major test for effective leadership is how successful they are in taking the role of managing change. These leaders must relate to the school and society's needs and wants.

Strategic leaders are people who have a clear vision on a widely slaved set of value and an aspiration of where their organization should be heading and who clearly articulate their vision in a manner that motivates others.

Typical of a SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities and threats) analysis, the weaknesses of the school needs to be converted into strengths, and the strength into opportunities (see Table 2). In the same spirit, all the aspects identified as threats to the effective functioning of the school (including internal threats such as lack of resources) must be turned into opportunities.

Table 2: Applying SWOT analysis to strengthen the school profile

STRENGTH	←	WEAKNESS
↓		
OPPORTUNITIES	←	THREATS

Applying SWOT Analysis to Strengthen the School Profile

One promotional tool a school could use is parental evenings, whereby parents are invited to receive performance awards on behalf of their children who performed well. Another could be one characterized as 'the offensive' strategy: an aggressive action or campaign. The School Admissions Committee could, for instance, go to feeder schools and carry out promotion activities, which could include distributing admission forms to prospective students. Through these kinds of activities, the mission of the institution could be realized.

Coleman (1994) suggested that "if the aims and value of the school are integral to marketing of the institution, the curriculum must be regarded as central to any marketing consideration" accordingly, the school may identify a particular subject among its existing subjects that they will

promote the most for instance, the school offers electricity, electronics, woodwork and technical drawing. The school may wish to market itself on the basis of these subjects, although it may be offering other subjects as well. The emphasis may also be placed on the nature of delivery of the course and how facilitators make the subjects enjoyable for students. This may result in those who wish to follow this line of training, gaining a keen interest because of the nature of delivery.

For the school to attain success, it needs to be able to manage change more effectively and efficiently. The leaders need to have leadership traits that are facilitative of the mandate of the school. The pattern of personal characteristics of leadership must have some relevant relationship to the characteristics and goals of the followers. The development plan can be done as follows:

Teamwork, motivation, and values, should also be maintained through total quality management. Total quality is fundamental about improvement. Leadership in quality organization including school has to be about transformation and change. The most effective leaders are people who are involved in personal change, so as to facilitate organizational growth.

Students and their parents should obtain information from both direct promotional channels under the control of the school. The school can provide orientation programs about the school during open day... Parents and students can also obtain information through indirect pathways for example, word of mouth from other students who attend the school or previously attended there or make personal contact with school. The grade 12 pass rate is presently a marketing tool that prospective parents//students use to gain entry/ or provision for parental choice.

CONCLUSION

It is not easy for a school to market itself because consumer behavior cannot be predicted with certainty when they are faced with offers and opportunities all of which assure quality. Actively marketing the school, however, created a better chance for it to reach and attract its target market. This mandate can only be taken care of if it is coupled with commitment to strive for excellence. This, in turn, calls for all incumbents to assume responsibility and implement practi-

cal strategies that are directed towards the achievement of set goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, it became apparent that parents need to support the school activities such as repairing computers and assisting with the development of computer skills among both teachers and students. Overall, the parents have to support computer teaching and learning programs of the school. Skills training in information technology, computers and internet use should be extended to all teachers. Skills training technology could be embedded in the school curriculum and the Department of Education should establish computer laboratories in all technical schools.

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