

**Strategic Orientation and Growth Performance of Private Secondary Schools in  
Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State**

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**Abstract**

*This study determined the predictive influence of strategic orientation practices on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State. Five specific objectives, five research questions and null hypotheses were stated to guide the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population was 3929 respondents, comprising 105 school principals and 3840 teachers from private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East. The sample size was 319 respondents, comprising of 65 principals and 254 teachers from private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East senatorial district. A 2-stage sampling process was adopted for the study. The researcher developed instruments titled "Strategic Orientation Practices of Principals of Secondary Schools Questionnaire (SOPSSQ) and Growth Performance of Secondary Schools Questionnaire (GPSSQ) were used for data collection in the study. Face validation of the instrument was carried out by three experts from the University of Uyo, Uyo. To ascertain the reliability of the instruments, it was trial tested on 40 respondents were not part of the sample size but were part of the population. Cronbach Alpha was used to analysis the data and a reliability coefficient values of 0.88 and 0.82 for SOPSSQ and GPSSQ were obtained respectively. Regression analysis was used to answer research questions and to test all the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. Findings of the study showed a low positive but not significant influence of Entrepreneurial and market orientation on growth performance. It was concluded based on the findings that strategic orientation though practiced in varying degrees by private school administrators, was still very low. It was recommended among others that, private school administrators should invest more in technology enhanced learning. Market research should be carried out by Private school administrators to determine the direction of the market and emerging new markets. This will help them to better position themselves.*

**Keyword:** Entrepreneurship, Growth, Orientation, Performance, Strategy

## **Introduction**

It is agreed that the last two decades has seen higher enrollment rates in all tiers of education in Nigeria. Both public and private schools have all benefited from this increasing enrollment. What is rather unfortunate is that measuring growth by enrollment masks the efforts of individual schools to strategically position themselves as preferred destinations for increasing enrollment. It is also possible that some schools are taking advantage of certain innovative approaches to better position themselves for prospective students to pick them over other schools. Furthermore, measuring growth alone by enrollment does not encapsulate all the growth components of a school. Growth performance is beyond enrollment. Growth is expanding a business to generate additional profits. A business can grow in one or more areas to achieve this expansion. However, growth is a function of intentional strategies, in this case, strategic orientation.

In the world of business, growth according to Nick (2024) refers to the process through which a company expands or increases its capabilities and resources. Growth may include a rise in revenue (sales), market share, customer base, or even the expansion of product lines and services. Business growth is not only about expanding in size but also about becoming more competitive and resilient in the marketplace. Each business may approach growth differently, depending on its goals, industry, and resources. Growth performance is a company's ability to profit from its resources and achieve its objectives (Arek, 2022). In practice, the term growth performance usually refers to a company's achievements. These are measured using metrics known as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Measuring KPIs, and business performance in general, is the first step to understanding your business on a more granular level and, as a result, quantifying its performance. For schools, KPIs may include enrollment, students' performance, profit, expansion and better learning environment.

Arafah (2018) defined strategic orientation as an organization's inclination towards allocating and coordinating resources in a manner to achieve competitive advantage and organization performance. According to Faiz (2015), strategic orientation can also be described as a set of strategic management principles that generates the behaviors of an organization intended to enhance its performance; and it represents the strategic direction of an organization to create the proper organizational behavior necessary to achieve the stated organizational goals. The authors also added

that strategic orientation focuses on the way an organization adapts to and interacts with its external environments.

The researchers simply define strategy orientation as the strategy that a firm implements to achieve and maintain performance. Strategic orientation aims at streamlining the actions of the firm towards arriving at its vision and mission. Strategic orientation aligns the organization's vision, strategy and mission with its culture to boost performance and gain competitive advantage in turbulent and ever dynamic environment. The changing nature as well as the composition of the market as regards private schools has necessitated the need for strategic orientation among private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The growing middle class and value for education as well as perceived shortcomings of public schools is causing a pivot among parents towards private schools. While the pivot to private schools is that of necessity among parents and guardians, the choice of which private school is a combination of many factors- from cost implication to value addition. This opens up to the educational sector among private participants to competition and the need for strategic orientation.

Furthermore, changes to the external environment with respect to the economy, society, religion and child goals are fueling parental decisions on what school to send their ward(s) to. The private school proprietors' capability to accurately define the external market uncertainty and modify their strategies accordingly to the market situation, can help give them a competitive advantage and sustain it for the long-term (Chan *et al.*, 2017). In addition, Bamel and Bamel (2018) revealed that strategic modification of the organization according to the market demand is the best source of competitive advantage, such as organizational top management ability to circumnavigate the turbulent business environment. Brozovic (2018) added that it also facilitates the organizational internal and external change drivers and ensures the organizational survival for the long-term.

Strategic orientation reflects how a company operates and uses its resources, decision-making style, and approach. The enterprise adopts a strategic orientation to achieve high performance based on the response and reshaping of the real environment. The strategy includes building new educational and administrative models to meet potential market demands as well as allocating resources to improve organization efficiency (Zhang *et al.*, 2020).

Business experts have identified several types of strategic orientation, ranging from market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, technology orientation, quality orientation, customer orientation, employee orientation, cost orientation, innovation orientation, competitor orientation, learning orientation and interaction orientation

(Yim & Tse, 2015). These dimensions have positive effects on organizational performance because they contribute significantly to goal attainment which is the driving force of any viable organization.

A market orientation strategy focuses on increasing growth by assessing and updating a school's marketing efforts to target new demographics. Using this strategy, the school administration identifies new markets to target through advertising, promotion and marketing. For example, a marketing department may create targeted advertisements for a new geographic location to reach a wider audience. Liao *et al.* (2024) revealed that market orientation is regarded as a crucial strategy or capability that helps organization stay competitive in today's uncertain business environment.

According to Nwachukwu *et al.* (2017) entrepreneurial orientation refers to individual opportunistic activity that creates value and bears risk, and is strongly associated with innovation. Organization that are entrepreneurial focused are able to take risk, and they commit their resources to explore new opportunities, which will lead to changing and shaping the environment where they operate in (Eggers *et al.*, 2015). Okangi (2019) averred that growth of a firm is significant to its size and output, which invariably, is closely associated with the firm's survival; In relation to educational institutions, Protomode (2019) purported that success or ability of educational institutions to accomplish pre-set goals rests on the leadership efficacy of the school head. Hence, it is critical that stakeholders focus on how school heads execute their jobs to achieve set strategic goals. School management is essential for achieving effective growth performance. The goal of school management is to ensure that the school operates efficiently and effectively, providing a safe and productive learning environment for students and staff. Effective school management involves a wide range of skills and knowledge, including leadership, communication, organizational management, and educational theory and practice. Managing private secondary schools requires application of several management principles in achieving the goals (Okumbe, 2011).

Education providers have greatly diversified in the past three decades. While school choice in middle- and high-income countries are generally guided by government policies around eligibility, location, and financing mechanisms, private schools that rely primarily on parents' ability to pay have expanded substantially in many countries in lower income Asia and Africa.

Much of the empirical analysis on public and private schools focuses on the differences between public and private schools in terms their performance, efficiency,

and their socioeconomic composition. However, very little has been done to review what separates private schools one from another and the driving force behind the differentiation among high performing private schools, moderate performing and low performing private schools aside finance. This study thus, seeks to determine the extent to which strategic orientation influence growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The changing economic climate, growing middle class, location and future considerations for the Childs's future as well as other external factors are making Nigerians reconsider the educational choices and schools that suit their criteria. This is also positioning schools to compete for students and status. This has created an opportunity for schools to distinguish themselves, by offering services through strategic orientation and management.

Some schools are conscious about their image, but are not intentional about growth. The growth indices for schools go beyond enrollment. It encompasses financial turnover, student performance, service quality, curriculum provision and implementation as well as staff motivation. Most private schools are squeezing staff for performance, but failing to plan for growth. Some even lack parameters to measure growth. More worrisome is the challenge that most private schools are struggling to reinvent themselves in the face of dwindling middleclass and economic challenges. This is in addition to the fact that parents are also demanding more from schools in terms of teaching, curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Schools are failing to grasp this change and opportunity and are struggling to meet these demands. This explains why some parents keep changing their ward schools in search for what suits their educational goal. Strategic orientation practices would help schools reposition themselves for growth. Where they fail to reinvent themselves through strategic orientation, they are most likely to be bumped out of the system.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to determine the extent of influence of strategic orientation practices on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, this study sought to:

- (i) Determine the predictive influence of entrepreneurial orientation on the growth performance of private secondary school in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.
- (ii) Determine the predictive influence of market orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.

### **Significant of the Study**

The study will be beneficial to Proprietors, Principals, Vice Principals, Teachers, Students and Researchers.

This study will be beneficial to Proprietor of schools because, it will helps them to align their resources and efforts toward achieving the goals. Strategic planning is where Principals establish, refine and review the major goals of the school and determine how they will achieve them; it enables the schools to: create a shared vision focused on its mission for the school and its teaching and non-teaching staff, students, and other key stakeholders; develop a road map with goals, objectives, actions and accountabilities for the school and its people; create a culture of results and continuous improvement throughout the school; build structures that enable the board and management to closely monitor the school's progress and set high standards for the school in key areas such as teaching and learning, financial management and governance.

This study will also serve as a reference point to researchers in and out of Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District who will want to research on similar area of study.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study;

- (i) What is the predictive influence of Entrepreneurial orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District?
- (ii) What is the predictive influence of Market orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significant.

- H<sub>01</sub>** There is no significant predictive influence of Entrepreneurial orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.
- H<sub>02</sub>** There is no significant predictive influence of Market orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design. The survey research design attempts to explain a phenomenon by studying a representative proportion of that population called a sample. As viewed by Pritha (2021), it is as a design that investigates variables without the researcher controlling or manipulating any of them.

The study was conducted in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-east senatorial district, Akwa Ibom State. Akwa Ibom Northeast Senatorial District is located between latitudes 4°25' and 4°40' North and longitudes 7°45' and 8°15' East, covering an approximate land mass of 2,143.09km<sup>2</sup>. The study area is bounded by Abak, Oruk Anam and Ini LGAs in the Northwest flank of Akwa Ibom State and Onna, Eket, Esit Eket and Okobo LGAs in the South. It is also bounded by the Cross River State and the Atlantic Ocean on the East. Northeast Senatorial District comprises nine local government areas which include: Etinan, Ibesikpo Asutan, Itu, Ibiono Ibom, Nsit Atai, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Ubium, Uruan and Uyo. The people in these areas are predominantly of the Christian faith, though some native African religious are still practicable. They are classified into the Ibibio ethnic group which happens to be the largest occupants in the area. The people are mostly farmers, craftsmen, merchants and civil servants. The zone has secondary schools within its jurisdiction, the most being private secondary schools.

The population is 3929 respondents. The target population comprises the principals and teachers in all the private secondary schools located in Akwa Ibom North East. It consist 105 private secondary school principals and 3824 teachers.

The sample size is 319 respondents, comprising of 65 principals and 254 teachers from private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East senatorial district. To obtain the sampled schools, the private secondary schools were randomly selected using a systematic sampling technique to obtain 65 schools. The principals of the

sampled schools automatically became part of the sample. Proportionate sampling was then used to select teachers from the sampled schools.

The researcher developed instruments titled “Strategic Orientation Practices of Principals of Secondary Schools Questionnaire (SOPSSQ) and Growth Performance of Secondary Schools Questionnaire (GPSSQ) were used for data collection in the study. The “Strategic Orientation Practices of Principals of Secondary Schools Questionnaire was responded to by the principals. The instrument was designed to elicit information about strategic orientation practices of schools that could influence their growth. The instrument was divided into sections, with section A devoted to demographic variables and section B elicited information on Strategic Orientation Practices. The items were structured with a 4 point rating scale comprising “Very Great Extent (4 points), Great Extent (3 points), Moderate Extent (2 points) and Low Extent (1 point). The Growth Performance of Secondary Schools Questionnaire (GPSSQ) was responded to by the teachers. It sought to determine the responses of teachers on the growth parameters in their schools. The instrument was designed using a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The two instruments were presented to three educational experts for face validation. Two of the experts were from the Department of Business Education and one expert from Department of Curriculum Planning, Educational management, all from the University of Uyo, Uyo. They assessed the instrument in terms of its items suitability to the constructs, clarity and grammar. Their corrections comments and observations were considered by the researcher to make the final version of the instrument.

To ensure reliability of the instruments, the internal consistency and reliability co-efficient for the instrument was obtained by using the split half method. This was done by administering the instrument on 20 principal and 20 teachers in other private secondary schools outside the sampled schools. The scores were subjected to the Cronbach Alpha Analysis to obtain the reliability of coefficient for the instrument. This gave value of 0.88 and 0.82 for SOPSSQ and GPSSQ respectively.

The researchers visited the sampled schools with the letter of introduction being presented to the principals. The researchers through the aid of briefed research assistants administered the questionnaire to the respondents. The teachers and principals were approached, the essence of the research was presented to them and the questionnaire administered. The process went on for six weeks and out of the 319 copies administered, 285 copies were retrieved and fit for data analysis.

Simple Linear Regression analysis was used to analyze the data. The coefficient of Determination  $R^2$  was used to answer the research questions. While testing the null hypotheses, the p-value is compared with 0.05 level of significance. If the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypotheses will be retained and if the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypotheses will be rejected. The package used for data analysis will be Statistical Package for Social Science.

The extent of influence was classified using the regression coefficient. Where the unstandardized coefficient is positive, then, there is a positive influence and when the unstandardized coefficient is negative, the influence is negative. The extent of influence is explained in relation to the contribution of each sub-variable of two growth performance using the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ). On the hypotheses, the decision was to reject the null hypothesis if the P-value is less than .05 level of significance and upheld or retained the null hypotheses if the p-value is greater than .05.

**Results**

This section presents the results of data collected.

**Research Question 1:** What is the predictive influence of Entrepreneurial orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District?

**Table 1: Summary of Regression Analysis for influence of Entrepreneurial orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	r	R Square
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	30.300	1.008			
Entre-Orientation	.063	.051	.073	.073	.005

*Source: Researcher's field computation (2024)*

Table 1 gives the summary of the simple regression test. The result shows that the unstandardized coefficient value is .063, indicating that there is a positive influence of entrepreneurial orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is .005, indicating that only (0.5%) changes in growth performance of private secondary schools is as result of entrepreneurial orientation. This indicates that entrepreneurial orientation has a very low positive

influence on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.

**Research Question 2:** What is the predictive influence of Market orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District?

**Table 2: Summary of Regression Analysis for influence of Market orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	r	R Square
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	30.443	.665			
1 Market-orientation	.066	.037	.104	.104	.011

*Source: Researcher's field computation (2024)*

Table 2 gives the summary of the simple regression test. The result shows that the unstandardized coefficient value is .066, indicating that there is a positive influence of Market orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is .011, indicating that only 1% changes in growth performance of private secondary schools is as result of Market orientation. This indicates that Market orientation has a very low positive influence on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.

**Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance

**H<sub>01</sub>** There is no significant predictive influence of Entrepreneurial orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.

**Table 3: Summary of Significant Regression Test for influence of Entrepreneurial orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	42.776	1	42.776	1.505	.221*
	Residual	8042.277	283	28.418		
	Total	8085.053	284			

\*Not Significant at  $p > .05$ .<sub>.221</sub>

Source: Researcher's field computation (2024)

Table 3 shows the summary of the regression test. The probability value (p-value) is .221. Since the probability value is greater than the alpha level of .05 ( $P > .05$ .<sub>.221</sub>), the result is statistically not significant. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted. Hence, there is a no significant predictive influence of Entrepreneurial orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.

**H<sub>02</sub>** There is no significant predictive influence of Market orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.

**Table 4: Summary of Significant Regression Test for influence of Market orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	87.516	1	87.516	3.097	.080*
	Residual	7997.537	283	28.260		
	Total	8085.053	284			

\*Not Significant at  $p > .05$ .<sub>.001</sub>

Source: Researcher's field computation (2024)

Table 4 shows the summary of the regression test. The probability value (p-value) is .08. Since the probability value is greater than the alpha level of .05 ( $P > .05$ .<sub>.080</sub>), the result is statistically not significant. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted. Hence, there is a no significant predictive influence of market orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.

### **Summary of Findings**

The findings of this study are hereby summarized

1. The result shows that entrepreneurial orientation has a very low positive influence on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.
2. Market orientation has a very low positive influence on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study were discussed under the following subheadings

#### **Entrepreneurial Orientation and the Growth Performance of Private Secondary Schools**

The result of analysis reveals that entrepreneurial orientation has a very low positive influence on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District. The related hypothesis test however, shows that there is a no significant predictive influence of Entrepreneurial orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.

This finding is in line with Ali et al (2020) who investigated the effect of entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation and total quality management on performance. The outcome of the findings indicated that Entrepreneurial orientation, total quality management and market orientation are significantly positive and associated with the performance of organizations.

This finding is further supported by Ferreira et al (2021) who evaluated the moderating influences of the entrepreneurial orientation: business performance relationship in SME'S. The findings showed that not all the internal and external factor of entrepreneurial orientation possessed similar effect. Though an entrepreneur's experience (internal factor) and environmental characteristic (external factor) have not indicated any influence on the relationship between Entrepreneurial orientation and SME performance.

This finding is also supported by Cui et al (2018) who studied the relationship of entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance. The study found entrepreneurial orientation to be positively correlated to firm performance.

### **Market Orientation and the Growth Performance of Private Secondary Schools**

The findings from analyzing the related research question shows that market orientation has a very low positive influence on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District. The hypothesis test confirms that there is a no significant predictive influence of market orientation on the growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District. This finding is in line with Ali et al (2020) who found that total quality management and market orientation are significantly positive and associated with the performance of organizations. This finding is in line with Moad Hamod *et al.* (2021) who examined the effect of market orientation, product innovation and marketing ethics on firm performance. They found a positive influence of market orientation on firm performance.

### **Conclusion**

The outcome of the study found that strategic orientation has a low positive influence on growth performance of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East. It was concluded based on the findings that strategic orientation though practiced in varying degrees by private school administrators, was still very low. There is room for improvements with respect to strategic leadership and management. Findings also showed that while growth was evident in enrollment, there was very little in terms of technology and differentiated service.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended based on the findings and conclusions of this study that:

1. Private school administrators should invest more in technology enhanced learning.
2. Dual curriculum that would allow students prepare for foreign A/Level and admissions should be introduced by private school administrators.
3. Market research should be carried out by Private school administrators to determine the direction of the market ad emerging new markets. This will help them to better position themselves.

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