The Influence of Quality Service Delivery on Competitive Advantage of Universities operating in Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to explore the influence of Quality Service Delivery dimensions on Competitive Advantage in universities operating in Kenya. This was an exploratory quantitative research.

Method: This was a quantitative exploratory study. A total of 378 respondents from 17 universities participated in the research. A self-administered likert scale questionnaire was distributed to both students and faculty.

Findings: The study found out that four dimensions of Quality Service Delivery namely Tangibles, Assurance, Responsiveness and Empathy had a strong positive significant relationship with Competitive Advantage. While Reliability had a positive relationship with Competitive Advantage, it was not significant factor. The findings are in line with several other studies and theories.

Research limitations: The study is limited because it was only carried among universities operating in Kenya. Furthermore, the study had been done only in service industry. This limits applicability to universities operating outside Kenya and other non-service industry.

Implications: The study supports developing and focusing on intangible competences in order to gain competitive advantage. The study implies that management need to work on crafting strategies that best combines resources in order to generate competitive advantage.

Keywords— *Quality Service Delivery, Competitive advantage, core competencies, distinctive competencies, intangible assets.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher Education industry has seen growth the past decade leading to intense competition. Wahlers and Wilde, (2011) notes that national and international competition in the university sector continues to grow while demand for stakeholders is high. Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino, (2006) observe that competition among universities is increasing with universities entering into joint ventures and franchise operations. Messah (2011) notes that intensity of competition has led to some universities to have relatively low student enrolment. As a result of this, the need for universities to build competitive advantage is self-evident, calling for strategies that can make the universities to thrive and prosper is evident (Taylor & Darling, 1991; Nicholls, Harris, Morgan, Clarke, & Sims, 1995; Coates, 1998; Canterbury, 1999; Hasan, 2008).

Competition has also intensified due to the increase in number of degree choices making prospective students have a wider variety of universities from which to choose from (Cubillo, Sanchez, and Cervino, 2006). In today's competitive academic environment where students have many options available to them, factors that enable universities to attract and retain students should be seriously studied (Hasan, 2008). Universities which want to gain competitive edge in the future, may need to begin searching for effective and creative ways to attract, retain and foster stronger relationships with students.

In today's world of global competition, rendering quality service is a key for success, and many experts concur that the most powerful competitive trend currently shaping marketing and business strategy is service quality (Abdullah, 2006). With significant changes taking place in universities over the last decade, it seems that higher education should be regarded as a business-like service industry, which focuses on meeting and exceeding the needs of students (Gruber, Fuß, Voss, & Gläser-Zikuda, 2010).

Abdullah (2006) further states that since 1980s service quality has been linked with increased profitability, and it is seen as providing an important competitive advantage by generating repeat sales, positive word-of-mouth feedback, customer loyalty and competitive product differentiation. In a competitive market, satisfaction with services may make the difference (Ham & Hayduk, 2003). Majeed and Ziadat (2008) states that if quality is embedded in the system, then the university will be able to fulfill students' needs based on students' traits and desires. Ham and Hayduk (2003) further add that satisfaction may influence a student's desire to attend or defect various universities. From this intense competition in the industry we ask the question, does Quality Service Delivery have any influence on competitive advantage?

According to Sawyerr (2004) Africa has seen rapidly increasing number of private universities and private wings (self-sponsored students) of public universities. This has resulted to numerous challenges especially to private universities. Some of the challenges include: maintaining a steady supply of students who can afford to pay for private university education, stiff competition from their public universities counterpart who have introduced parallel degree courses for full paying students, aggressive competition from foreign universities who have launched an aggressive campaign for recruiting local students and, offering specific and narrow programs (Oketch, 2004). From this intense competition in the industry we ask the question, what significant competitive advantages do universities have and do such lead them to better performance?

Over the past few years new universities have emerged and a number of colleges have been upgraded to universities (Onsongo, 2007; Gudo, Olel, & Oanda, 2011). This phenomena has resulted to increase in competition among universities since services offered are similar and customers have options to choose from (Ugboma, Ogwude, Ugboma, & Nadi, 2007; Hasan, 2008; Cerri, 2012; Wahlers & Wilde, 2011). While competition improves services on one hand, on the other it makes some to compromise on the services just to locking them in. In the recent years quality has become an important competitive strategy in the global market (Wit & Meyer, 2005; Hasan, 2008; Cuthbert, 1996; Hanaysha, Abdullah, & Warokka, 2011; Deshields, Kara & Kaynak, 2005; Jaspreet, 2009).

A number of studies recognize that service quality can bring an organization a lasting competitive advantage (Lewis, 1989; Moore, 1987; Ugboma, et al., 2007). As Baron, Harris and Hilton (2009) put it organizations are operating in extremely tough environments, and service managers now realize that improving service quality is crucial for gaining a competitive advantage. Service quality improvements lead to customer satisfaction and cost management that result in improved profits (Stevenson, 2002). Product and service quality create competitive advantages for firms (Gupta, McDaniel, & Herath, 2005).

The literature review shows that while there are a number of studies carried out on Quality and Competitive Advantage, most of the studies have been conducted outside Africa and more also outside Kenya; save for the case of Owino (2013) and Mang'ungyi and Govender (2014) which did not include Competitive Advantage and used the parameters of Higher Education Quality measurements scale not SERVQUAL. Furthermore, majority of these studies have been carried out in non-service industry and did not explore the influence of service quality on competitive advantage and organizational performance. It was therefore imperative to scientifically explore the actual situation on how to safeguard this important sector and this study embarks to fill this gap. This research therefore sought to explore the influence of Quality Service Delivery on Competitive Advantage in Universities in Kenya.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The assumption of this research is that understanding the significant factors of quality service delivery that lead to Competitive Advantage would result to better focus on key items in quality service delivery. This assumption is in line with resource based view theory of (Barney, 1991). This research therefore seeks to explore the service quality dimensions that universities possess and assess whether they are significant and lead to Competitive Advantage. The specific objectives were:

1. To evaluate the influence of Quality Service Delivery, *Tangibles* on Competitive Advantage of Universities in Kenya.
2. To explore the influence of Quality Service Delivery, *Assurance* on Competitive Advantage of Universities in Kenya.
3. To find out the influence of Quality Service Delivery, *Reliability* on Competitive Advantage of Universities in Kenya
4. To examine the influence of Quality Service Delivery, *Responsiveness* on Competitive Advantage of Universities in Kenya.
5. To assess the influence of Quality Service Delivery, *Empathy* on Competitive Advantage of Universities in Kenya.

to determine if Quality Service Delivery, Tangibles, Assurance, Reliability, Responsiveness, Empathy have any influence on Competitive Advantage (b) to explore if the dimensions are significant for competitive advantage.

III. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following research hypotheses were set for the study:

1. There is a significant relationship between Quality Service Delivery, *Tangibles* and Competitive Advantage.
2. There is a significant relationship between Quality Service Delivery, *Assurance* and Competitive Advantage.
3. There is a significant relationship between Quality Service Delivery, Reliability and Competitive Advantage.
4. There is a significant relationship between Quality Service Delivery, *Responsiveness* Competitive Advantage.
5. There is a significant relationship between Quality Service Delivery, *Empathy* and Competitive Advantage.

IV. THEORIES

This study anchored the variables on the following theories: Service quality theory advanced by Gronroos (1982) and promulgated by Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1985), Total Quality Management, Competitive Advantage, Resource Based View Theory and Michael Porters five-force model.

A. Concept of Service Quality (SERVQUAL)

SERVQUAL is designed to measure consumer perceptions and expectations regarding quality of service in five dimensions namely reliability, tangibles, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, and to identify where gaps exist (Becket & Brookes, 2008). SERVQUAL is based on the underlying premise that service quality can be defined as the extent to which a service meets a customer's needs or expectations.

The construct of service quality as conceptualized in the literature, centers on SERVQUAL model that posits that service quality depends on the nature of the discrepancy between Expected Service (ES) and Perceived Service (PS).

When ES is greater than PS, service quality is less than satisfactory, when ES is less than PS, service quality is more than satisfactory and when ES equals PS service quality equals satisfaction (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1985).

Although initially developed to be applied in the financial sector, it has been modified over time to measure other sectors as well such as telecommunication, healthcare and hospitality to measures customer satisfaction (Curry and Sinclair, 2002; Van der Wal et al., 2002; Sultan and Simpson, 2000). Researchers support the continued use of SERVQUAL to measure customer satisfaction, although they recommend that more work is needed to improve its scales (Wang, Hing-Po, & Yang, 2004; Landrum & Prybutok, 2004; Eastwood, Brooker, & Smith, 2005). Thus, service quality can be operationally defined as the difference between customer expectations of service and perceptions of actual service delivery (Wisniewski, 2001).

B. *Total Quality Management*

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a comprehensive management approach which requires contribution from all participants in the organization to work towards long-term benefits for those involved and society as a whole (Becket & Brookes, 2008).

There is no consensus on the definition of quality. Garvin proposed a definition of quality in terms of the transcendent, product based, user-based, manufacturing-based and value based approaches. Garvin also identified eight attributes to measure product quality (Garvin, 1993). Juran defined quality as fitness for use. Juran focused on a trilogy of quality planning, quality control, and quality improvement. Crosby defined quality as conformance to requirements or specifications and identified 14 steps for a zero defect quality improvement plan to achieve performance improvement (Kruger, 2001). According to Deming, quality is a predictable degree of uniformity and dependability, at low cost and suited to the market. Deming also identified 14 principles of quality management to improve productivity and performance of the organization.

Feigenbaum described the concept of organization wide total quality control. He was the first user of total quality control concept in the quality literature. He defined quality as the total composite product and service characteristics of marketing, engineering, manufacturing and maintenance through which the product and service in use will meet the expectations by the customer (Kruger, 2001). Major common denominators of these quality improvement plans include management commitment, strategic approach to a quality system, quality measurement, process improvement, education and training, and eliminating the causes of problems. Total quality management is the culture of an organization committed to customer satisfaction through continuous improvement. This culture varies both from one country to another and between different industries, but has certain essential principles which can be implemented to secure greater market share, increased profits, and reduced costs (Kanji and Wallace, 2000).

C. *Competitive Advantage*

Competitive advantage occurs when an organization acquires or develops an attribute or combination of attributes that allows it to outperform its competitors (Eden & Ackermann, 2010). These attributes can include access to natural resources, or access to highly trained and skilled personnel human resources, new technologies. The following section points out some of the parameters of competitive advantage.

1) Resource Based View Theory

The resource-based view adopts an internal perspective to explain how a firm's unique internal resources serve as a basis for its strategy and performance. Resource heterogeneity means that different firms hold different resource portfolios and that these differences produce variability in performance across firms (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993). Although firms may attempt to imitate resources held by successful competitors, or at least to replicate their benefits, resource bundles remain heterogeneous due to imperfect inimitability, created by 'isolating mechanisms' (Rumelt, 1984). Barney (1991) examines the link between firm's resources and sustained competitive advantage. Four empirical indicators of the potential of firm's resources to generate sustained competitive advantage- value, rareness, inimitability, and non-substitutability — are discussed. The model is applied by analyzing the potential of several firms' resources for generating sustained competitive advantage.

Sustained competitive advantage can only be achieved when the resource is valuable, rare, is difficult to imitate, has no substitutes and is taken advantage by the organization. If a resource lacks some of these can only give temporary competitive advantage or competitive parity or can even be a disadvantage to an organization. Therefore, in order to gain and sustain competitive advantage, organizations need to evaluate resources that give them sustained distinctive competence and build them.

According Pearce and Robinson (2007) resources are classified into three basic groups tangible, intangible assets and organizational capabilities. Tangible assets are physical and financial means a company usess to provide value to its customers. They are the types of resources found on a firm's balance sheet. They include production facilities, raw materials, financial resources, real estate and computers. Although tangible resources may be essential to a firm's strategy, because of their standard nature, they are only occasionally a source of competitive advantage. Intangible assets are resources such as brandnames, company reputation, organizational morale, technical knowledge, patents and trademarks, and accumulated experience within an organization. These assets often play important roles in making a firm gain and sustain competitive advantage.

2) Michael Porter's five-force theory

The ultimate aim of competitive strategy is to cope with and ideally to change those rules in the firm's favor (Porter, 1998). The rules of competition in a service are embodied in entry of new competitors, threat of substitutes, bargaining power of buyers, bargaining power of suppliers and the rivalry among existing competitors. Educational strategists should be more concerned with two out of the five forces of Porter (1979): the threats of new entrants (internationalization of traditional universities, corporate universities, virtual universities) and bargaining power of customers (students with more option choices). Both impact directly in the financial results of universities and the niche strategy or focus (market segmentation) seems to be the key to win to defend and amplify the market position of any university (McElwee and Pennington, 1993). Another option is the differentiation, when universities assumes to offer innovative educational services, distinguishing from its direct competitors (Tam, 2007). Another factor to be taking into account is the sixth force (Porter, 1991), the governments' influence and other types of organizations. Being the educational market an atmosphere usually controlled by the governments, this force (government regulation) cannot be disrespected when it deals with the development of competitive strategies in universities.

V. EMPIRICAL STUDIES

A study by Sci (2013 attempted to test the effect of Total Quality Management (TQM) practices towards competitive advantage and organizational performance in Indonesia. The results showed that TQM practices have positive and significant effect both on organizational performance and competitive advantage. Competitive advantage has a positive and significant effect on organizational performance. Organizational performance is more influenced by competitive advantage than TQM practices.

A study by Singh (2013) attempted to find out the role played by the quality of product in competitive advantage in marketing and the steps to attain the product quality. The finding were that product quality, customer satisfaction, and company profitability are intimately connected. Higher levels of quality results in higher levels of customer satisfaction. Quality creates value and customer satisfaction. It further found out that only through continuous managing for excellent quality the firm can maintain bright product / brand image in the customer's mind in this competitive world.

A study by Addae-Korankye (2013) investigated whether or not TQM is a source of competitive advantage in both service and manufacturing sectors in Ghana. Among the objectives were; to find out the impact of TQM on organizational performance, challenges in the implementation of TQM policies and practices, and to ascertain whether TQM is a source of competitive advantage in both service and manufacturing firms in Ghana. It was found out that when properly implemented, TQM will be a source of sustained competitive advantage. The study also revealed that while the quality of manufacturing products can be tested and controlled, it is difficult to control the quality of services before delivery because of their in Tangibles nature. It was recommended among others that organizations should cultivate a total quality management culture; properly designed training programmes on TQM should be regularly organized for staff of organizations so as to ensure that best practices of TQM are implemented if they want to achieve a sustained competitive advantage.

A study by Powell (1995) which was carried out in USA, sought to examine the TQM as a potential source of Sustainable Competitive Advantage. The study found out that most features generally associated with TQM such as quality training, process improvement and benchmarking do not generally produce advantage, but that empowerment and executive commitment can produce advantage. The study also found out that tacit resources, and not TQM tools and techniques, drive TQM success and that organizations that acquire them can outperform competitors with or without the accompanying TQM ideology.

A study by Nilssona, Johnsonb and Gustafssonc (2001) which was carried out in Sweden, sought to analyze and investigate how key internal quality practices of product versus service organizations (employee management, process orientation, and customer orientation) influence customer satisfaction and business results. The study found out that for product organizations, internal quality practices influence customer satisfaction and business results primarily through an organization's customer orientation. For service organizations, both customer and process orientation impact customers directly, and employee management has a direct impact on business results. The research also supports the claim that organizations with a quality foundation are in a better position to adopt a customer orientation

A study by Nejati, Shafaei, Salamzadeh and Daraei (2011) which was carried out in world leading universities sought to find out whether universities are concerned about corporate social responsibility by exploring the website content and annual reports of the world top 10 universities. The study found out that world leading universities are committed to their social responsibility and they provide sufficient information on most of the core areas of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

A study by Chen, Kuo and Yang (2010) which was carried out in Taiwan higher education performance, used Delphi methodology, to find out domestic and foreign educational evaluation indicators, established performance evaluation indicators (PEIs) for evaluating Taiwan higher education performance, and also provided evaluation standards for planning and implementations to each university. The results indicated that self-evaluation on performance evaluation indicators (PEIs) for higher education that goes through these indicators could achieve the objective of performance management.

A study by Okhato and Wanyoike (2015) which was carried out in Nakuru, Kenya using a survey sought to identify strategies of determining effective utilization of resources by Public Universities in Nakuru County through determining effect of part-time Lecturers. The study established that Public Universities in Nakuru County are faced with challenges of effectively utilizing of their resources in order to gain competitive advantage, especially in handling its specific RBV on part-time lecturers. The study recommended public University Management to sensitize and provide guidelines to all stakeholders on strategies regarding effective utilization of resources for realization of desired goals for competitive advantage, design interventions in creating emphasis on policies and procedures to be followed for successful outcome, RBV of the Public Universities.

VI. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this study the conceptual framework illustrates that the extent to which Quality Service Delivery is established in the universities has influence on the Competitive Advantage. The independent variable Quality Service Delivery was evaluated as a multi-dimensional construct, shaped by the five previously explained dimensions or constructs namely (Tangibles, Assurance, Responsiveness, Reliability and Empathy). This was informed by (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1985). The Competitive Advantage variable (moderating variable) was evaluated using constructs by Barney (2002) namely institution's image, institution's market profile and client oriented culture. (See figure 1).

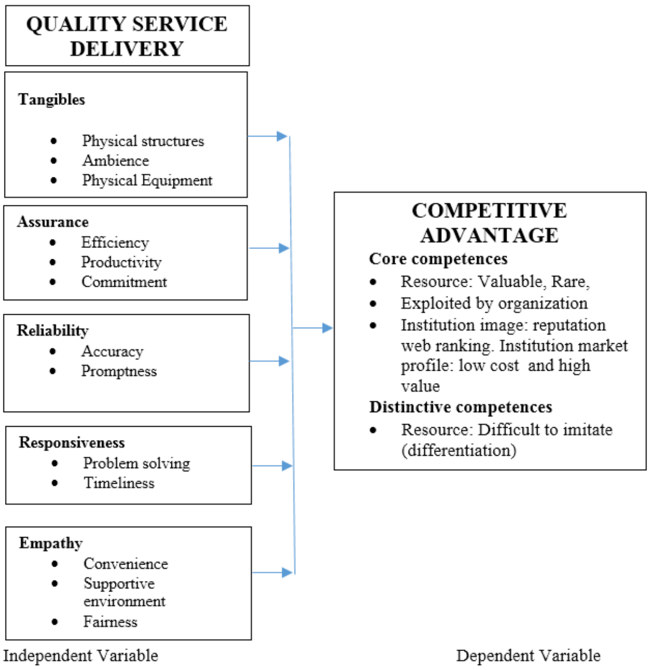

FIGURE I, CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

VII. RESEARCH GAP

In the universities, a clear revelation on whether Quality Service Delivery can lead to Competitive Advantage remains unclear. While as there have been a number of empirical studies, majority of them have been outside the Kenyan context, more to say outside Africa. This therefore, questions the reliability and applicability to the Kenyan context which is faced with different challenges. There are also inconsistent findings noted in the literature. This makes one to wonder whether the same findings could be relevant to the Kenyan context or they will be mere assumption.

Worldwide research gaps still exist especially in relating the Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage. There are no studies, which the researcher has come across, in Kenya demonstrating the relationship between Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage. This study therefore, seeks to fill these gaps and add to the body of knowledge focusing on Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage in the universities in Kenya.

VIII. METHOD

This research used cross sectional survey research design. The study was also exploratory and descriptive which is appropriate when the study is vague hence the goal is to improve the final research design by becoming familiar with the basic facts and concerns, developing a picture of what is occurring and determining the feasibility and sense of direction for rigorous follow-up (Burns & Burns, 2010). The population of interest was all universities in Kenya that have a charter and the respondents were lecturers and students. At the time the study was carried out there were 53 universities in Kenya. The respondents who were 378 came from 17 universities. Data was collected by use of questionnaires which contained close ended questions for quanititative data and open ended questions for qualitative data.

IX. FINDINGS

A. *Reliability*

The overall reliability was 0.93 which is far are above the suggested value of 0.5 thus the study was reliable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Nunnally, 1974). On the basis of reliability test it was supposed that the scales used in this study is reliable to capture the constructs of the study.

B. *Quality Service Delivery Dimensions and Competitive Advantage*

The objective was to assess the extent Quality Service Delivery, *Tangibles, Assurance, Responsiveness, Reliability, Empathy* (together) influence Competitive Advantage. The study used linear regression analysis to examine the relationship between Quality Service Delivery dimensions together, and Competitive Advantage. The predicted model is as presented below:

$$CA = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \mathcal{E}_0$$

From this equation, β_0 was the estimate of the intercept and $\mathcal{E}_0$ was the associated regression error term, $\beta_1 X_1 \ldots \beta_5 X_5$ were the beta value associated with Tangibles, Assurance, Reliability, and Responsiveness. CA stood for Competitive Advantage. The relationship was examined by testing the dimensions of Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage as in the research hypothesis:

H_1. There is a significant relationship between Quality Service Delivery, *Tangibles, Assurance, Responsiveness, Reliability and Empathy* and Competitive Advantage.

C. Correlations

As for the correlations, Tangibles had a Pearson correlation of 0.648, Assurance 0.638, Reliability 0.634, Responsiveness 0.659 and Empathy 0.555 as indicated in Table I. This means that all the variables had a strong positive relationship on Competitive Advantage except Empathy which had a moderate positive relationship. All the dimensions from the correlations are significant with p. value of less than 0.05.

TABLE I, CORRELATION OF VARIABLES

Correlations		TANG	ASSUR	RELIA	RESPON	EMPA	CA
TANGIBLES	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N	378					
ASSURANCE	Pearson Correlation	.770**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					
	N	378	378				
RELIABILITY	Pearson Correlation	.641**	.685**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000				
	N	378	378	378			
RESPONSIVENESS	Pearson Correlation	.638**	.670**	.809**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000			
	N	378	378	378	378		
EMPATHY	Pearson Correlation	.517**	.543**	.542**	.587**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		
	N	378	378	378	378	378	
COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE	Pearson Correlation	.648**	.638**	.634**	.659**	.555**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	378	378	378	378	378	378

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

D. Model Summary

A linear regression analysis using OLS method of estimation was adopted in determining the effect of Quality Service Delivery dimensions on Competitive Advantage. Two components were evaluated, the correlation (R) and the coefficient of determination (R^2). The model one in Table II, had correlation R of 0.745. Based on the correlation, this shows that the five predictors (*Tangibles, Assurance, Responsiveness, Reliability and Empathy*) had a strong relationship with Competitive Advantage.

An evaluation of model relating to the five dimensions of Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage was done. As for the coefficient of determination R^2 of 0.555 means that the predictors, Quality Service Delivery dimensions, explain 55.5% of the predicted variable, Competitive Advantage. This means that 44.5% cannot be explained by the predictors. This means that the model is a moderately strong fit.

TABLE II, MODEL SUMMARY

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.745^a	.555	.549	.51604

a. Predictors: (Constant), EMPATHY, TANGIBLES, RELIABILITY, ASSURANCE, RESPONSIVENESS

E. ANOVA

The significance of the resulting model was examined under the associated ANOVA output presented in Table III. The model had F-value (5, 372) = 92.751 and the p-value was 0.000. This meant that the model was statistically significant at α = 0.05 level in explaining the simple linear relationship between the five dimensions of Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage.

TABLE III, ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	123.496	5	24.699	92.751	.000^b
	Residual	99.062	372	.266		
	Total	222.558	377			

a. Dependent Variable: COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

b. Predictors: (Constant), EMPATHY, TANGIBLES, RELIABILITY, ASSURANCE, RESPONSIVENESS

F. Coefficients

The study examined the coefficients of five dimensions of Quality Service Delivery as presented in Table IV. Tangibles had the p = 0.000, Assurance p = 0.032, Reliability p = 0.059, Responsiveness p = 0.000, Empathy p = 0.000. This means that all the coefficients of the five dimensions of Quality Service Delivery are significant except Reliability which has p. value above 0.05.

TABLE IV, COEFFICIENTS

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	B	***Std Error***	***Beta***		
(Constant)	.465	.168		2.766	.006
Tangibles	.249	.057	.245	4.330	.000
Assurance	.127	.059	.130	2.158	.032
Reliability	.108	.057	.119	1.896	.059
Responsiveness	.199	.056	.225	3.548	.000
Empathy	.174	.048	.162	3.636	.000

Dependent Variable: Competitive Advantage

The relationship between the five dimensions of Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage were presented as:

CA = 0.465+0.249 TANGIBLES +0.127 ASSURANCE + 0.108 RELIABILITY +0.199 RESPONSIVENESS + 0.174 EMPATHY

Tangibles had a beta value of 0.249 as shown above. This meant that a unit increase in Tangibles would result in a 24.9 % increase in Competitive advantage. Assurance had a better value of 0.127 which means a unit increase in Assurance would result in 12.7% increase in Competitive Advantage. Reliability had a beta value of 0.108 which means a unit increase in Reliability would result in 10.8% increase in Competitive Advantage. Responsiveness had a beta value of 0.199 which means a unit increase in Reliability would result in 19.9% increase in Competitive Advantage. Empathy had a beta value of 0.174 which means a unit increase in Empathy would result in 17.4% increase in Competitive Advantage.

X. DISCUSSION

The findings relate with that of Sci (2013), in Indonesia, which showed that TQM practices have positive and significant effect both on organizational performance and competitive advantage. The findings also concur with Addae-Korankye (2013), in Ghana, who found out that when properly implemented, TQM has a source of sustained competitive advantage. The findings however, do not correspond to the study by Powell (1995), in USA, which found out that most features generally associated with TQM such as quality training, process improvement and benchmarking do not generally produce advantage, but that empowerment and executive commitment can produce advantage.

XI. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions relate directly to the objectives. This study sought to find out the influence of Quality Service Delivery on Competitive Advantage. The study determined that there exists a significant relationship between Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage.

The study found out that Quality Service Delivery dimensions (together) have a very strong relationship with Competitive Advantage with a Pearson correlation R of 0.745. The study also found out that the dimensions explain 55.5% of the model, making the model a moderately strong fit. The study found out that four dimensions of Quality Service Delivery namely Tangibles, Assurance, Responsiveness and Empathy had a positive significant relationship with Competitive Advantage while as Reliability was not significant. The study concluded that Quality Service Delivery has an influence on Competitive Advantage of universities.

XII. IMPLICAITONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study findings led to both theoretical implications and managerial implications. The overall hypothesis of the study was the existence of a significant relationship between Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage in Universities operating in Kenya. The results confirm the existences of a statistically significant relationship between Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage and by so doing, the study adds to existing literature.

The findings of this study shows that Quality Service Delivery dimensions are incomplete and that Quality theorist can uncover more dimensions in different service contexts. The study unveils two broad dimensions in the university Quality Service Delivery context and goes ahead to rate their predictive power in the following order: Intangibles and Tangibles.

The study established a moderately strong positive correlation between Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage. To managers of universities, the overall Quality Service Delivery of the institutions is a strong antecedent to Competitive Advantage. Universities perceived by customers as offering better services tend to attract more students as the satisfied ones spread positive word of mouth about the institutions. The findings of this study can therefore be used by managers in universities who seek to pursue Competitive Advantage as a winning strategy in an increasingly competitive industry.

XIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the finding of the study, the following policy recommendations are critical as regards to Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage. It has been established that Quality Service Delivery is critical for Competitive Advantage. The study therefore recommends CUE to strive towards setting standards for Quality Standards which need to be adhered to. Few of the lapses have been as a result of lack of implementation. Such could be in form of moonlighting and continuous improvement through research, ratio of full time staff and students in the universities, classroom sizes, library, e-learning facilities and extra-curricular activities.

This research focused on Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage. Future attention should be aimed at unearthing more determinants of Competitive Advantage. Considering this study was conducted in Kenya, some of the findings might be more appropriate in the Kenyan context. The Kenyan university cultural context may have a significant influence on Quality Service Delivery and Competitive Advantage. It might not be appropriate for this study to make the claim that the findings are applicable to all service industries. However, it is hoped that the study can be replicated in Kenyan universities with significant consistency. Perhaps today insecurity has become a concern a study could be done on tangibles (security) and Competitive Advantage.

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