

# IMPACT OF STRATEGIC PLANNING PRACTICES ON ACADEMIC MARKETING IN IRAQI HIGHER EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

*Management of university education is increasingly becoming one of the most critical elements of human practice in many countries around the world, due to its direct socioeconomic and political impact on society's quality. Consequently, investment in a good higher education plan is significant for the evolution of future societies and generations and requires extraordinary effort from management in strategic planning as well as execution phases of education. In this regard, the conceptual idea of strategic planning plays a key role in the development of the Iraqi educational process, and many researchers have explored it as a critical tool that prepares institutions of higher education to respond to future scenarios and educational needs.*

*The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of strategic planning practices on academic marketing in Iraqi private universities. The study sample was randomly selected and consisted of 139 professors who belong to private universities in Iraq. A questionnaire was used as an instrument survey and structured of 30 items, which was validated by experts, who provided positive results. The data were analyzed using simple and multiple regression and SEM analysis techniques. The results indicated that there is a positive impact of strategic planning practices on academic marketing in Iraqi private universities, which needs to take into consideration strategic planning practices.*

**Keywords:** Environmental Scanning Intensity, Planning Flexibility, Planning Horizon, Locus of Planning.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is becoming a victim of the ongoing conflict in Iraq despite the extraordinary determination on the part of the government and society. Before 1990, education was a flourishing sector in Iraq (Diwakar, 2015). It was as a unique and still undergoes reconstruction.

High-quality education is a product of strategic planning which encompasses opportunity seeking, competitive advantage and strategies to mitigate risks and create value and wealth for stakeholder and society as a whole (Stokvik et al., 2016). This needs environmental, organizational and individual resources, and processes which entail adaptation of the resources to enhance value creation, competitive edge, and wealth creation, are necessitating needs for appropriate performance strategies (Vecchiato, 2015) which manifests itself by helping organizations to discover and utilize opportunities successfully or risks avoided by its competitors (Sarpong & Hartman, 2018).

Organizations are looking at success factors in a highly complex environment. This is a critical factor, and organizations are trying to find a suitable solution (Harris, 2005), one of the key pillars to organizational success in the current global competitive marketplace is strategic planning (Collings & Mellahi, 2013). With a steady increase in the level of marketing challenges, different organizations find it quite cumbersome to enhance their planning (McDonald & Wilson, 2016; Gathenya, 2015).

According to Sarpong & Maclean (2016), incorporation of strategic planning can culminate long-lasting organizational benefits through identification of business opportunities, and mitigating possible risks which slow down their performance. The institution of higher education is tasked with the mandate to impart knowledge to young entrepreneurs and workers according to the labor market (Merisotis, 2015). Therefore, these institutions need to improve their output to achieve successful marketing and work towards finding effective factors to realize the goals. Strategic planning gives the organization positive results, and thus universities can improve its estimates and plans (Haddawee, 2018).

The marketing of Iraqi education depends on the academic marketing strategy employed by the relevant authorities (Scott, 2016). The authorities in Iraq that market the education include the ministry of education, Iraqi university linkage programs ULP and external aid from an international organization like UNESCO, the World Bank and UNICEF (Tichnor, 2016).

The strategic planning in place is built Iraqi universities to restore the lost glory of once shining universities (Robson, 2014). The ministry of education has since executed its plans in developing new colleges. The target of the program is to rebuild the education system of Iraq to its initial position (Kleinberger, 2016). Iraq was distinguished from the other early by allowing the establishment of private colleges and universities, where the first private college was founded in 1993, and after 2003, private colleges competed with government colleges and sought to improve their competitive marketing role by looking for success factors to achieve this goal.

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to determine the impact of strategic planning practices on academic marketing in Iraqi higher education.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a process that leads human capital to establish organizational goals, strategies, and policies for achieving those goals, develop plans to ensure implementation of strategies and obtain the ends sought (Steiner, 2010). It is the design, development, and implementation of different operational plans by the organizations Cole (2004), these plans can be short, medium or long term (Willke & Ligo, 2007). Although the strategic plans are usually punctual and must be effective at a certain time, their consequences are maintained over time, since changes in the business environment persist; that is why it is said that strategic planning belongs to a continuous process and must be supported by actions developed in order to enable the good performance of these plans.

### Strategic Planning Practices

Strategic planning for this study consists of environmental scanning intensity, flexibility, planning horizon and locus of planning (McDonald & Wilson, 2016; Gathenya, 2015).

### **Environmental scanning intensity**

Environmental scanning is the acquisition and use of information about events, trends, and relationships in an organization's external environment, the knowledge of which would assist management in planning the organization's future course of action (Bigley, 2018). The planning process comprises of scanning and attainment of the system needed for the better gain a realization of the outcome.

### **Planning flexibility**

Planning flexibility looks at the way firms make adjustments to environmental changes (Gathenya, 2015). Cole (2004) states that effective planning necessitates the need for flexibility and innovation as major considerations in the choice of plans, putting into consideration all steps put in place as far as feedback is implemented. Flexibility sets boundaries within which to operate from as stated in the strategic plan.

### **Planning horizon**

Planning horizon is the length of the future time period that decision-makers consider in planning and it considered as the length of planning periods (Gathenya, 2015). Planning horizons should provide a platform that allows both short-term and long-term strategies to run simultaneously.

### **Locus of planning**

Organizations can be characterized as having either a shallow or a deep locus of planning (Ireland et al., 2009). A deep locus of planning denotes a high level of employee involvement in the planning process, including employees from virtually all hierarchical levels within the firm (Gathenya, 2015).

### **Academic Marketing**

Academic marketing is defined as all activities that are concerned with identifying the intangible needs of the customers of the university, which are usually consumed at delivery (Hackley, 2009). Kotler & Fox (1995) defines academic marketing as the analysis, planning, implementation and control of programs that are designed to achieve an exchange of valuable objects in the target markets in order to achieve the objectives of the institution. Marketing involves the process of identifying products and services to meet the needs and requirements of the target market, effective pricing, communication and distribution to stimulate and serve markets (Crouch & Matthew, 2012).

Academic marketing aims to attract customers by working to meet the needs and desires of the clients. The university, which wants to attract as many customers as possible, must strive to provide strong and distinctive academic programs (Kotler & Fox, 1995). Academic marketing requires the use of marketing mix and its components (price, recreation, distribution, product), and the most efficient educational institution is capable of understanding and coordinating marketing mix components.

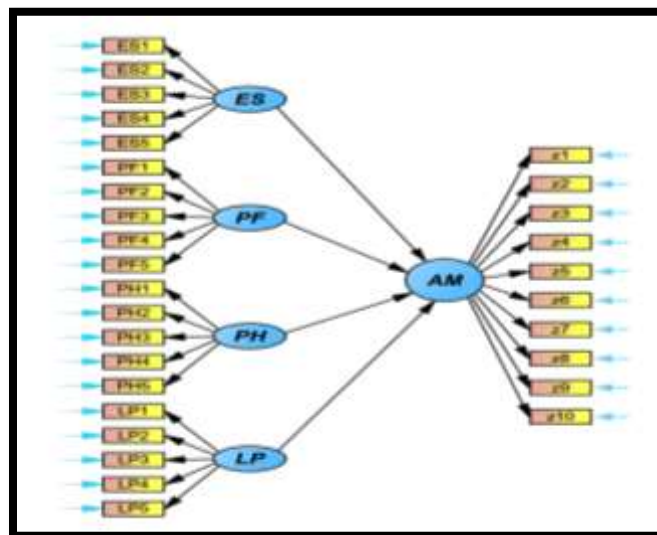
## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Instrument

The instrument of this study was the survey it was used and conducted in private universities in Iraq, the population for this study comprises of the professors, random sample has been selected among them, and the sample size is 139. The first section deals with strategic planning and its dimensions (Environmental Scanning intensity (ES), Planning Flexibility (PF), Planning Horizon (PH), Locus Of Planning (LP)), depending on the scale was developed and standardized by (McDonald & Wilson, 2016; Gathenya, 2015), the section deals with academic marketing, depending on the scale was developed and standardized by (Crouch & Matthew, 2012). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency and it is refer to a good value of all the items and the value of Cronbach's Alpha was 0.881 in general which insures the reliability of the instrument.

### Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual framework developed shall further conceptualize the impact of SPP dimensions on AM, and it is developed according to the literatures and scales, as it is presented in Figure 1.



**FIGURE 1**  
**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

## RESULTS

The hypothesized relationships between SPP and AM was modeled as follows: ( $H_1$ ) there is a significant explanatory role of ES on AM; ( $H_2$ ) there is a significant explanatory role of PF on AM; ( $H_3$ ) there is a significant explanatory role of PH on AM; and ( $H_4$ ) there is a significant explanatory value of LP on AM.

The results reported in Table 1 illustrate the output of the testing of the hypothesized relationships between variables of SPP and AM. To be able to test the underlying path analyses

and the hypothesized relationships, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was relied upon to establish the significant t-values and path coefficients ( $\beta$ ).

The Likert scale variables were transformed into composite scores of the variables representing the four dimensions of SPP including (ES, PF, PH, and LP). The results of the partial correlations of these variables with AM are presented in Table 1, and point to positive associations that are statistically significant at an alpha of 0.01.

| Variable  | ES     | PF     | PH     | LP     | AM |
|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----|
| <b>ES</b> | 1      |        |        |        |    |
| <b>PF</b> | .773** | 1      |        |        |    |
| <b>PH</b> | .699** | .786** | 1      |        |    |
| <b>LP</b> | .653** | .713** | .796** | 1      |    |
| <b>AM</b> | .699** | .737** | .754** | .733** | 1  |

The results of Table 2 and Figure 2 indicate the existence of an overall positive relationship AM on the one hand and SPP with respect to its constituent variables including ES, PF, PH, and LP in a statistically significant manner (positive  $\beta$  and t-value being  $>1.67$ ).

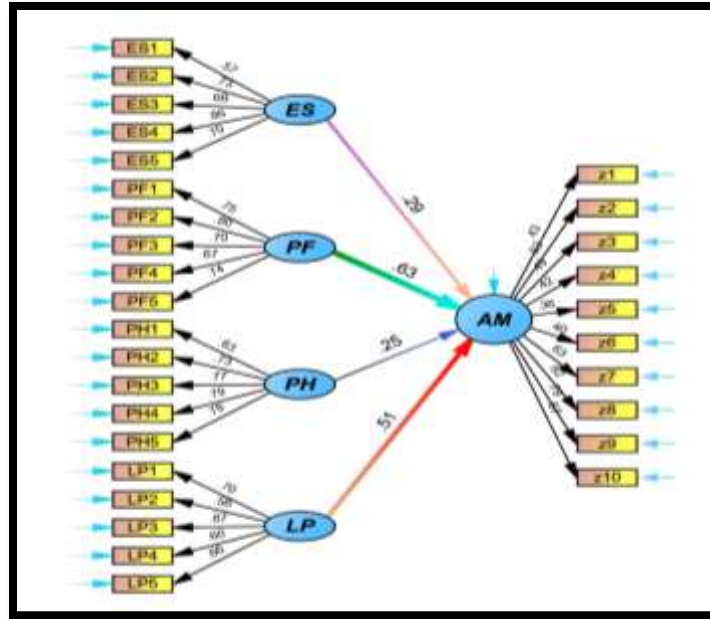
Nonetheless, while the availability of ES poses a strong positive influence on AM, the influence of PF is positive and statistically significant. Moreover, PH also relates positively with AM and the influence of LP is positive and statistically significant. Hence, on the basis of the findings from data analysis, all the four hypothesized relationships ( $H_1-H_4$ ) are significant, consequently confirming the correctness of the hypothesized presence of a relationship between SPP through underlying factors, and AM. Also, the roles of the specific underlying variables of SPP differ significantly in terms of their explanatory power of the relationship between SPP and AM with ( $R^2=0.667$ ) as shown in Table 3.

| Hypothesized path   | Coefficient | Results     |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|
| ES $\rightarrow$ AM | 0.29        | Significant |
| PF $\rightarrow$ AM | 0.63        | Significant |
| PH $\rightarrow$ AM | 0.25        | Significant |
| LP $\rightarrow$ AM | 0.51        | Significant |

**Note:** \*Significant at ( $P<0.05$ ).

| Model | R                  | R <sup>2</sup> | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | Estimate S.E |
|-------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| 1     | 0.817 <sup>a</sup> | 0.667          | 0.655                   | 0.32815      |

Note: a. Predictors: (Constant), X1, X2, X3, X4.



**FIGURE 2**  
**PATH ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO SEM**

The results of the regression analysis of the unweight mean scores of the measured variables refer to the estimated regression model as follows:

$$AM=0.779+0.291ES+0.632PF+0.253PH+0.511LP$$

## DISCUSSION

In recent years, the private universities concerned with the shift from a production orientation to marketing orientation in order to be able to face competition in higher education (Hall & Witek, 2016). The Iraqi Ministry of higher education has started granting licenses to establish private universities on high conditions in order to encourage them to reduce their performance (Kleinberger, 2016). Private universities are trying to find out the successful methods to build a strategy to ensure that their services are successfully marketed; this requires organizations to identify their chances of success and look for the factors needed to prepare for the future.

Many studies on higher education strategic planning focus on the increasing exercise of overall planning which takes into account the challenges as well as globalization (Almayali & Ahmad, 2012), and are largely able to examine and address the circumstances surrounding the particular organization's internal and external context, along with the challenges such an institution is likely to face in an effort to improve the overall performance of both the learners and the institution (Lerner, 2015).

There exists relationship between strategic planning and university education in terms of quality of service delivery (Al-Janabi & Urban, 2011), since planning is critically important in facilitating the successful realization and expediting of the organization's goals (Bryson, 2018). In this regard, strategic planning is seen as the long term planning wherein the methods to be utilized, along with timelines as well as deliverables are outlined and laid out, taking into

account the potential bottlenecks that are likely to hinder the realization of the organizational goal and challenge the overall execution of plans (Albon et al., 2016).

Higher education institutions are undergoing important changes involving the development of new roles and missions, which is having implications for their structure and administration (Scott, 2016). These institutions have responded differently based on their particular regulations and social circumstances. The goal of the study is to explore how Iraqi private universities define their objectives and strategies through strategic planning practices to respond to the changing demands of academic marketing. The study aimed to test the effect of four dimensions of strategic planning (environmental scanning intensity, planning flexibility, planning horizon, locus of planning) in academic marketing, the study sample was randomly selected and consisted of 139 professors who belong to private universities in Iraq.

## CONCLUSION

The study found that strategic planning practices strongly influence the academic marketing offered in the institution of higher education. Therefore, education system reforms are required to improve on the output to achieve successful marketing and to look for strong factors to attain organizational goals. The results have shown that strategic planning offers significant outcomes in improving academic marketing. Strategic planning in the education sector has been found to result from transactional environment emanating from uncertainties and need to plan for the future. Private universities need to improve their plans in order to achieve academic marketing. The results have shown that strategic planning gives positive results in improving organizational outcomes and that will help to improve academic marketing.

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