

Developing Marketing Strategies for the Growth and Survival of Private Schools in Ilorin Metropolis

by

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Abstract

The recent liberalization of education in the country has led to an upsurge in the number of schools established by private entrepreneurs in all tiers of education. The primary and secondary sectors are the most affected. The study revealed several marketing strategies employed by schools to increase their market share. Some were conventional marketing methods while some were non-conventional. The study's findings revealed that schools can be classified as Future, Tomorrow, Today and Yesterday schools. This was modeled along the Boston Consulting Group Matrix (BCG). The study recommended appropriate marketing strategies for each of the private schools classified under the BCG Matrix.

Key words: Marketing, Marketing Technique, School, Educational Sector, and Private Schools

1. Introduction

The educational sector particularly at primary and secondary level has been facing a lot of challenges in recent times in Nigeria. There have been low qualitative services among the primary and secondary school while the players are trying to outperform their competitors in attracting and holding a large number of students without providing qualitative services. There is growing evidence that private participation in education can improve effectiveness in developing countries in a cost-effective manner and without compromising equity (Emunemu, 2008).

Marketing technique is one of the most important techniques needed for survival and development of schools and also one important concern for the school managers is to achieve aimed markets. Hence, in today's complex dynamic and highly variable environment, the schools need to design and adopt a strategy which could help them improve their enrolment level and performance. Marketing is based on the concept that the customer is the most important person to the organisation. In order to survive or even prosper, every organization either private

or government owned must retain its existing markets and continually strive to secure new and profitable customers, (Olujide and Aremu 2004).

The American Marketing Association (2000) defined marketing to consist of the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producers to consumers. Marketing is the process of communicating the value of a product or services to customers. Marketing might sometimes be interpreted as the act of selling products, but sales is only part of marketing. From the societal point of view, marketing is the link between a society's material requirements and its economic patterns of response (Wikipedia 2012). Marketing satisfies these needs and wants through exchange processes and building long term relationship.

According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2004), the basic legal framework for educational management in the country, as provided in the 1999 Constitution, clearly spells out the primary national objectives for education in Nigeria. It states that the government should seek to ensure equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels, to promote science and technology and to eradicate illiteracy. Education is accorded concurrent legislative status in both the 1979 and the 1999 Constitutions. This indicates that both Federal and State governments have legislative jurisdiction as well as corresponding functional responsibilities with respect to education. There is a division of labour, though not fully articulated among the three tiers of government with respect to the different levels of the educational system. A few functions are exclusively assigned to the Federal or State governments like petroleum resources, external affairs, and defence, among others.

Suffice it to say that Government has been largely responsible for the provision of education in Nigeria. Invariably, there has been a tremendous public sector participation in educational provision in the country. Interestingly, an increasing number of children, youths' and adults' need, and in many cases actively demand, education. However, government alone cannot meet these demands. These probably led to the participation by the private individual to complement the government efforts.

Marketing is an organizational function, a set of processes for creating, delivering and communicating value to customers and managing customer relationship in ways that benefit the organisation (Handin, 2013). It is the act of choosing target markets through market analysis and segmentations, as well as understanding consumer buying behavior and providing superior customer value (en.wikipedia/wiki/marketing). Babara (2012) summarises the concept of

marketing as a three-step process of determining customer needs, developing a product to meet those needs, and delivering that product to the market place.

A strategic business unit (SBU) is a profit center which focuses on product offering and market segment. SBUs typically have a discrete marketing plan, analysis of competition, and marketing campaign, even though they may be part of a larger business entity. An SBU may be a business unit within a larger corporation, or it may be a business unto itself or a branch. Organizations may be composed of multiple SBUs, each of which is responsible for its own profitability. The objective of this study is to examine the relevance of Strategic Business Unit (SBU) as a marketing techniques adopted by private schools in Ilorin metropolis.

2. Literature Review

School marketing is a systematic approach to building relationship between your School and the people you want to attract. This can be students, parents, teachers, alumni, potential consumers good the wider public. Many private and religious schools. Some in desperate need for new students in order to survive have learned the importance of marketing. The most effective school leaders, principals, teachers and manager learned a long time ago that marketing is a necessary tool for support credibility and survival (Linda and Lynette, 2013).

Today, schools are springing up at every corner of the city, jostling for the few numbers of students ready to attend private schools. This is in the era of serious improvement in the program and products of Public schools in the state, in order words private schools also have ever improving public schools to contend with. The private schools in the metropolis are mapping out various forms of marketing strategies that will enable them capture substantial portion of the market from the public schools and also from their contemporary private schools.

The importance of marketing in any organization is therefore to identify the needs of a particular customer or group of customers with the aim of offering products or services that will satisfy their needs and also to ensure customer patronage continuously. Marketing is concerned with the organization being in constant touch with its public, knowing what it wants and needs and adapting it to delivering the desired satisfaction. (Adedoyin, 2012)

According to Harrison (2002), in the early 60s, marketing in the organisation industry generally meant advertising and public relations. However, a number of interrelated forces in the business environment have contributed to the impetus of rapid changes in the many organisations. A school is not in existence to perform academic activities only but to satisfy the market needs. One of the main objectives

of school is to provide knowledge for the students. In addition to learning, a school provides employment opportunities in a community. Marketing entails the realization of the roles enumerated and it is of course wider in scope than mere advertising and public relation.

Marketing as a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating offering and freely exchanging products or services of value with others (Kotler, 2000). He further described marketing as "the art of selling products", but people are surprise when they hear that the important part of marketing is not selling! Selling is only the tip of the marketing iceberg.

Drucker (1992), a leading management theorist, puts marketing this way: There will always be the need for some selling. But the aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous, to know and understand the customer so well that the products or services fit him and sell themselves. Ideally, marketing should stimulate customers' readiness to buy. All that should be needed is to make the product or service available to customers.

The American Marketing Association Committee (1960) defines marketing as "the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producers to consumers or end- users". The definition unfortunately, makes marketing sound largely like distribution which is an element of the marketing mix. It fails to indicate the roles of marketing in determining what goods are to be produced. It does not indicate the specific activities that constitute markets. Olujide, Aremu and Bamiduro (2009) posited that marketing begins with the generation or germination of products, services or ideas and ends only when the firm is certain that the consumer is really satisfied with the product or service provided.

Kotler, Jain and Suvit (2002) defines marketing as human activities directed at satisfying needs and wants through exchange process. They contend that marketing exists when a man decides to satisfy his needs and wants in a particular manner referred to as exchange. Exchange itself represents one of the four means by which a man obtains a product which can generate need satisfaction. The other options are: self production, forcible seizure from another person in the form of stealing, and the fourth option is that of exchange.

The implications of modern marketing definition include the following:

- a. Owing to the fact that marketing is the total system of activities designed to plan price, promote and distribute one's satisfying products and services to

present and potential customers, it is managerial rather than simply legalistic or economic.

- b. It emphasizes the point that the entire system of business action should be market or customer – oriented; that is, customers' wants must be recognized and satisfied effectively.
- c. The marketing programme must be seen with the germination of the product idea and termination with customer post – purchase satisfaction.
- d. The definition implies that the business can only be measured profitably in terms of sales volumes on the long-term basis. Thus, customers must be satisfied for the company to get the repeat purchase, which is critical to long – term business survival.

Therefore, it must be regarded that marketing process exists whenever and wherever the producers and consumers of the economic goods and services are separated.

3. Marketing Strategies and School System

Marketing strategies in school should focus on match products and services with customers needs or wants, decide where and when to sell, distribute, promote products services ideas and set prices. The strategic approach depends on whether the school is addressing existing customers or is trying to attract new customers and whether the product or service is new or already established. Baker (1992), indicated that, marketing strategies are the means by which a marketing goal is to be achieved. It is usually characterized by a specific target market and if a marketing goal is to be achieved, then marketing strategies are employed. Each institution has a marketing strategy, which is an overall plan for the attainment of institutional goals. Aremu (2013) posited that it is necessary to create strategic opportunities and to manage the concomitant changes required within any system. He further buttressed that in the world of marketing, organizations seek to maximize returns to shareholders by creating a competitive advantage which can be achieved by identifying, providing, communicating and delivering value to customers.

A strategy is a long term plan to achieve certain objectives. A marketing strategy is therefore, a marketing plan designed to achieve marketing objectives (Kotler, 2010). The strategic plan to adopt by various schools therefore is the detailed planning, involving marketing research, and then developing a marketing mix to school applicants and existing students. Marketing strategies in schools is all about

increasing student applications, registrations and how to serve the existing students better as competition between schools is greater than it has ever been.

4. Marketing strategies employed by schools in Ilorin

- (i) **Curriculum Mix** - Science/ICT preference
 - Mixture of science/vocational curriculum
 - Adoption of moral education
 - Mixture of Nigerian, French, British curriculum
 - Extended curriculum services
 - Holiday / Saturday lessons
 - Extended school hours
 - Admission/Remedial services e.g IJMB, SAT, TOEFL, ICSCE etc.
- (ii) **Student Personnel Services Mix**
 - Hostel Services
 - Transport/Mobility services with new air conditioned Buses
 - Clinic services
 - Educational tours, within and outside the country
 - Participation in elite school competitions like Shell cup, Cowbell, Science Olympiad, etc.
 - Students formal and informal groups — Boys Brigade, Girls Scout, Boys Scout, Road Safety Club, etc.
 - Guidance and Counseling Services
- (iii) **Co-Curricular Activities**
 - Games, Sports, Athletic meeting standard sport Equipment/facilities
 - Clubs, Societies, Weeks (science week) Days-Mothers Day, Fathers Day, Empire Day, French Day, Day out with mum etc.
- (iv) **Parent Personnel Service**
 - Vibrant and purpose driving Parent Teacher Association.
 - Open Days, visitation Days
 - Flexible fees payments,
 - Waivers, school scholars/scholarship programmes.

(v) Information Service

- School public relation/customer service officer
- Radio/TV adverts
- Sponsorship of Radio/TV education related programmes
- Website designs e-mail, online internal examination results
- Placement of school handbills in strategic offices like Banks, churches mosque, post office etc.

(vi) Enrolment Incentives

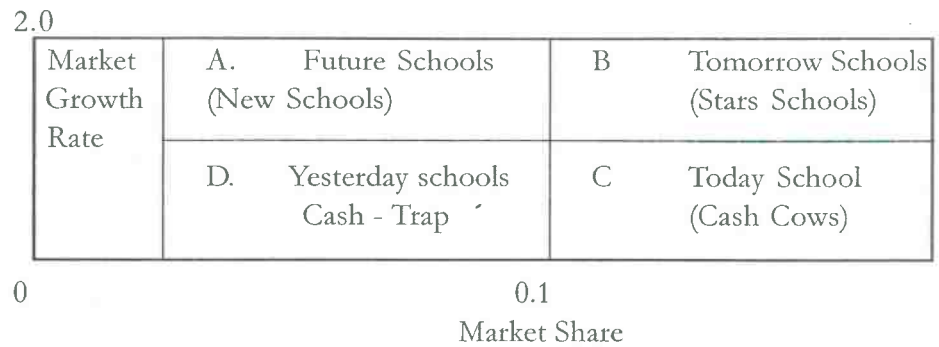
- Free admission forms to prospective students
- Rebate on admission forms
- Partnering with various junior schools to encourage enrolment (schools integration linear)
- Automatic granting of admission to pupils in Junior/Primary schools to the Basic/Senior classes.(schools integration vertical.
- School beautification, programmes.

The study identified three strategic models for private schools

1. Strategies based on Market dominance. Under this strategy, schools are classified based on market share or dominance of the education industry in the metropolis. Four types of market dominance strategies were identified. Market leader, market challenger, market follower and market nicher.
2. Porter-generic strategies. This is base on the dimension of strategic scope and strategic strength of the schools. The school's strategic scope refers to its market penetration ability while strategic strength refers to the schools sustainable competitive edge or advantage over others. Here three (3) schools were identified, pioneer schools, close followers, late followers.
3. Market War-fare strategies, where military warfare methods of knocking out perceived enemies are employed. This strategy is seldom used in Ilorin or at least traces of its deployment as a marketing strategy was not seen.

The study found out that a mixture of market dominance and porter generic strategies were employed by many schools, a larger majority however employed the market dominant strategies with the intention of capturing as much as possible a large share of the education market. The study found a long list of methods adopted by the schools in Ilorin to capture and arrest first time customers and retain old customers. The strategies ranged from curriculum mix to robust co curricular activities.

Fig 1: Classification of Schools - modeled along Boston Consulting Group Matrix



Source: Authors Conceptualization 2013

Future Schools: They are users of large resources because they are located in high growth markets. For it to cope with high growth demand, it must use up a lot of resources. It is assumed that, future schools are relatively new thus it wants to **expand** its market share by attracting more patronage in the form of continuously increasing enrolment. Cash flow is relatively small and atime negative. Most parents who patronized the schools are risk takers because they are out to experiment with the new school. Future schools would need a lot of money on advert to inform the public about its existence and achievements. Consequently, ineffective application of effective planning in many organizations and schools is the main thrust for their inability to predict and make a sound decision which lead to the failure to achieve projected performance (Adeyemi and Aremu, 2009).

Tomorrow Schools: Schools in this quadrant are in the high growth market thereby uses up a lot of resources, at the same time they enjoy relatively high market share. As enrolment increases and consumer confidence rises, the school grows to quadrant B. Its capacity to accommodate large patronage increased, all facilities are fully on ground and most resources are already into full use. The school has larger share of the education market.

They are called STAR schools. The schools records high turnover because of high enrolment, they become lucrative schools. Because of its high resource generation, more schools will be attracted into the business and its market share may begin to decline. The growth rate equally declines and as a result, it may enter quadrant C.

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Today Schools: They generate lot of cash because they still enjoy the goodwill of being formerly a star school. They are low cash users because most of their capital expenditures have been met. They provide surplus cash for use because they have reached their enrolment cap/peak thus recurrent **expenses** are not increasing except in situations where wages are reviewed **upwards**.

The schools have attained their enrolment cap. i.e full classroom utilization rate have been attained and it becomes economically unwise to increase class size any further. It has gotten to a point of rejecting students (new enrolments especially those with low entrance scores). The school is still facing competition from other schools that are emerging or enlarging their market shares. As the competitions continue to increase, its share of the market continue to decline and may enter quadrant D.

Yesterday Schools: They are schools that have low cash balances even though they have not used up so many resources, but also generate very little resources. They are slow-growing schools. They may "break-even" generating barely enough cash to maintain the business's market share. The break-even unit only provides a social benefit of keeping jobs for workers in the school but from the accounting point of view, such a school is worthless because it is not generating cash for the owner.

5. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey which aimed at identifying various marketing strategies used by private schools in Ilorin Metropolis. This is to ascertain which of the identified strategies are yielding positive results. Also it used the information collected to classify schools into strategic units modeled around the Boston Consulting Group Matrix (B.C.G. Matrix). The study effectively categorized each school into a relevant quadrant of the Matrix and suggests appropriately the marketing strategies suitable for each quadrant. The study used designed questionnaire titled "Private Schools Marketing Strategies Questionnaire" (PSMSQ) to gather data from selected schools. The total population of private schools in Ilorin metropolis is 93. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 34 private schools which represent the sample size for the study. The choice of private schools was based on their knowledge and experience in the marketing strategies. 35 schools were purposively selected for the study and 34 schools returned their questionnaire and finally participated in the study, which represented 97.14% response rate.

6. Data presentation and Discussions

The result of frequency distribution analysis revealed that the sex distribution of respondents shows that 60.3% were male and 39.7% were female. Majority of the school owners are in the age between 41 to 50 years (58.2%). Majority of the school owners have first degree and second degree (73.2%), while those with Ph.D. Degree are 16% and only 10.8% with Education qualification along with their first and postgraduate qualifications.

Hypothesis One

Ho1: Adoption of marketing technique has not enhance the enrolment of private schools.

Table 1: marketing technique has enhanced the enrolment of private schools

Variable	Observed	Expected	Residual
Strongly agreed	15	6.8	53.4
Agreed	6	6.8	15.2
Disagreed	1	6.8	-7.4
Strongly Disagreed	7	6.8	-11.3
Uncertain	4	6.8	-16.1
Total	34		

Source: Field survey 2013

Table 2: Test statistics

	Response
Chi-Square ^a	93.731
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000
0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5.	
The minimum expected cell frequency is 6.8.	

The result shown in table 2, where $x^2_{calc} = 93.731$, $x^2_{tab} = 9.49$, degree of freedom $df = 4$ revealed clearly that the calculated value of chi-square is greater than the tabulated value, hence the rejection of null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternate hypothesis (H1), which states that marketing strategy precipitated the private schools enrolment. In the hypothesis, the degree of freedom is 4 and .05 level of significance is used for the analysis.

It can be inferred that the calculated value of chi-square is equally greater than the tabulated value. The null hypothesis is hereby rejected and therefore accepting the alternate hypothesis (H_1), which states that **marketing strategy** has significantly contributed to the present enrolment in the private school in Ilorin metropolis.

There result of oral interview from the study revealed that there are four strategies open to school, these are: Strategy to Build, Strategy to Maintain, Strategy to Harvest and Strategy to Divest.

Strategy to build and maintain (Future schools) The schools in this quadrant are new schools with relatively low enrolment. The marketing strategies opened to these schools are that of building and **maintaining** the school's facilities and resources. The school will need to involve in publicity to ensure that parents and prospective customers are well informed about the school's existence, its potentials, resources and edge over other schools. Apart from its curriculum content which must be emphatic (Nigerian, British or Mixture etc) the school must also embrace a variety of student personnel services, most importantly; it must improve and empower its information mechanism. Prospective enrollee must know that the school is in existence.

Strategy to maintain (Tomorrow Schools): The school is the market leader and must work on how to remain so, thus it must continue to innovate. The strategies opened to it are that of maintenance, all facilities must remain at their best state. The school should work very hard to retain good and experienced teachers. The school must consistently post good outputs in terms of student results. Most importantly it must plan ahead of others, must always come up with something novel which others will want to imitate, and most also spend money on advertisement and publicity.

Personnel must be encouraged and motivated with good condition of service and relatively secured job with chances of upward movement in job status. All these will elicit good commitment on the part of teachers and other personnel that have helped to build the brand name.

Strategy to diversify and retain (Today schools) The option opened to the schools here is to maintain their infrastructures and personnel so that they can continue to generate cash. Also if such schools have reached the height they are now through narrow curriculum, diversification of its curriculum will provide added

impetus. Programmes like SAT, GMAJ, TOEFL and ICGSE will help expand its market base and open new market frontiers. This will insure it from the strength of its nearest competitors.

Massive investment in publicity and advertisement will help maintain brand image and promote the brand name. Old customers must be linked up to ensure continuity in patronage, new generation of prospective customers who are offshoot of initial customers of the school will stick to the school because they have first-hand information on the previous feats and heights the school have reached.

Strategy to Harvest and Divest (Yesterday schools) In a pure productive business unit, the option available to such business unit is to Harvest and Divest because it has become unproductive. This is not the case with education system which is seen essentially a social service, It is therefore not advisable to fold up because of its perceived effects on job loss and placement of students when schools are wound down. Rather, a combination of strategies will save the school. First, if the Marginal Cost (MC) is still equal to her Marginal Revenue (MR). $MC = MR$, the school can continue to operate because it's still able to meet all its operational costs. i.e. pay salaries and take care of operating expenditures.

Secondly, the school can embark on massive publicity to catch the attention of **emerging** markets, marginal markets and undecided clients could be swayed by robust advertisement. Information about the school is a means that the school can be used to sell its image through most popular media in its environment (Aremu and Saka, 2010). Thirdly, the school can embark on integration, curriculum integration to save cost, vertical integration if the school have many units, e.g. Primary, secondary and remedial section. Unproductive units **can be closed down** while resources are pulled towards programmes that are still **economically viable**. It is important to identify among these units which is producing the highest returns and exploit it the more.

Finally the school should invest massively in turning the school around, old structures, outdated equipment and facilities must be replaced, continuous uplift of facilities must be its major investment strategy.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study found out that, the greatest marketing strategy opened to schools is their academic accomplishments. The believed in the old saying that, "a good wine needs no market" is relevant when you observe the relative growth of schools with good academic accomplishments. However, further studies may

be required to establish the degree of relationship between academic achievement of schools and their control of the education market in their locale.

Most schools classified as good schools are usually strategically placed to do great accomplishments. These schools have unique characteristics: responsiveness, flexibility, two-way communication, shared decision making, accountability, adequate resources and individual recognition. As owners of schools or managers of schools who wants to embark on marketing his/her school to prospective customers, must first ask him/herself these very fundamental questions.

If choice becomes a reality tomorrow, would my school be the school of choice? Would I send my child, grandchild, niece or nephew to my school? Is my school team equal to or better than the competition? Are my customers satisfied? If you are honest in answering the questions and you answered no to any of these questions, then take a very close look at the area of concern and brainstorm some realistic strategies to make it better. The truth of the matter is that, as a school manager, teacher and parent are the greatest marketing tools of any successful school.

Most of these schools do not survive their second "birthday" because of certain constraints. These constraints include lack of capital, human resource challenges, market-based challenges, unfavourable legal, regulatory conditions and weak institutional regimes. SBU is one of the key means by which schools can overcome these harsh business conditions to survive and grow into recognizable entities. The proprietor of such schools needs to undertake a complete repackaging of their services and offerings in order to encourage and stimulate continuous patronage and loyalty.

The study therefore recommends that private schools in Ilorin metropolis should intensify its adoption of marketing strategy. An SBU analysis was used to evaluate the marketing strategies for competitive advantage, adopting the proprietors' point of view as reflected by school approach. The emphasis has been on comparing the competitive advantage of private schools in terms of curriculum mix, student personnel services mix, co-curricular activities, parent personnel service, information service, enrolment incentives.

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