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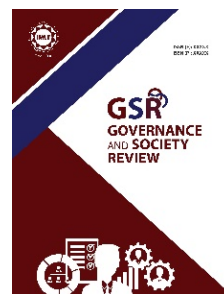
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A Qualitative Analysis of Strategic Management and Planning in the Gambian Public Service Organizations

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Abstract

The current study investigates the strategic management and planning practices in the public service delivery (PSD) in public service organizations (PSOs) in The Gambia, West Africa. This study adopted a qualitative research design by conducting in-depth interviews with the senior public servants and beneficiaries of the selected PSOs, with a sample size of 20, by using a purposive sampling technique. The findings from these interviews showed that strategic plans of PSOs were formulated, implemented, and evaluated in consultation with both internal and external stakeholders. Moreover, to accommodate the divergent views and interests of influential groups and individuals, this study also, established that PSOs reviewed and effected slight changes in their strategic plans to keep abreast with the environment during the implementation process. Thus, this paper concluded that strategic management has significantly shaped PSD of PSOs. Finally, the study revealed that strategic plan implementation had a positive impact on PSD and helped in achieving the goals and objectives of PSOs in PSD in The Gambia.

Keywords: delivery, organisation, public service, plan implementation, strategic management, strategic planning

Introduction

The world has become globalized and very competitive with a number of environmental challenges such as intense competition, changing needs, increased demands, and the ability to meet the expectations of the public consumers. In view of these challenges within the business environment, public service organizations (PSOs) need to update their strategic plans continuously to meet the global requirements for effective public service delivery (PSD). It requires public service organizations to maintain the quality service delivery to ensure the competitive success. However, PSOs

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in The Gambia faced key challenges to keep updated with the global pace in their strategic plans and policy implementation. The National Assembly's Public Accounts Committee and Public Enterprise Committee (PAC/PEC) Report (2015/16) indicated that some PSOs in the country did not formulate and implement strategic plans appropriately because they did not consider strategic management significant and for that reason did not have strategic plans, or did not review them for many years. To respond to these challenges actively in the competitive world, PSOs in The Gambia require regulation to adopt the strategic management, to formulate and implement strategic plans to provide public services effectively to the citizens with a view to achieving competitive success. Specifically, it was enshrined in Part III, Sections 11 (1 and 2) and 12 (1 and 2) of the 1990 Public Enterprise Act that public agencies and enterprises in The Gambia must have approved strategic plans.

Several past reforms and strategies Structural Adjustment Programme (1980s), Administrative Reform (1987), Civil Service Reform Strategy (2007-2011), Republic of The Gambia Country Strategy Paper and National Indicative Programme (2008-2013), and Civil Service Reform Strategy Programme (2012-2015)) in The Gambia's public service sector have led to the establishment of many public service organizations, directorates, and small departments in the ministries. Although the reforms aimed at improving the public service, poor governance, little performance management, institutional deficiency, constraints in recruitment, high staff turnover, and inadequate pay and training characterize the Gambian public service (World Bank, [2010](#)). Also, non-merit-based promotions, poorly remunerated front-line service providers; a few policy and planning skills; non-application of acquired skills from abroad; and difficulty in attracting highly qualified and experienced staff to the civil service were common phenomena in the public service of The Gambia (World Bank, [2010](#)). To assist in addressing these aforementioned challenges, PSOs applied the strategic management in public service delivery to meet the required expectations of the public.

Several empirical studies (Poister et al., [2010](#); Ferlie & Ongaro, [2015](#); Ferlie & Parrado, [2018](#); Tamimi et al., [2018](#)) are conducted on strategic management in the public sector, nevertheless, a wide gap still persists, especially in linking strategic management to the service delivery in The Gambia. The findings from these research results indicated that an

increasingly substantial number of state governments, local governments, and public agencies presently used strategic planning (Bryson & Edward, [2017](#)). Scholars like Nutt and Backoff ([1993](#)), Moore ([2000](#)), Llewellyn and Tappin ([2003](#)), and Tamimi et al. ([2018](#)) have conducted empirical studies on strategic management in public organizations. Recent studies (Elbanna et al., [2016](#); Johnsen, [2015](#); Pasha et al., [2018](#); Poister et al., [2013](#); George & Desmidt, [2016](#); Hansen & Ferlie, [2016](#); Bryson et al., [2017](#), Höglund et al., [2018](#); Ijewereme, [2018](#); Elliott et al., [2019](#)) on strategic management and strategic planning in the public sector, although empirical but failed to investigate the application of strategic management in PSOs for PSD. However, commensurate scholarly attention is yet to be drawn to this major area of governance in The Gambia. The kernel of this study is to establish strategic plan implementation to see its effect on public service delivery in The Gambia. Equally, there is a dearth of literature and clarity on the degree to which strategic management was specifically applied or practiced in PSOs in The Gambia for efficient and effective PSD. Strategic management practices for PSD of public service organizations in The Gambia during the period of study were uncertain. Added to that, how strategic management plans implementation impacted PSD, and how strategic plans implementation helped in achieving the objectives of PSOs in The Gambia under the period of the review were uncertain and lacked empirical research evidence, hence, the need to investigate strategic management and PSD in PSOs in The Gambia. This study specifically focused on strategic management, its implementation, and its impact on public service delivery (PSD). Furthermore, this study aimed to study the effects of strategic management in the period of uncertainty, by reviewing previous literature and empirical studies regarding The Gambia.

Theoretical and Empirical Literature Review

Studies have emphasized the use of strategic management in increasing the efficiency and performance of public service delivery to show how to resolve intricate problems the government encounters (Bryson, [1988](#); Andrews et al., [2006](#); Andrews et al., [2017](#); Ijewereme, [2018](#); Elliott et al., [2019](#)). It is essential to build and improve capacity in the public service organizations in order to appropriately manage the policy initiatives and implementation in PSOs with a view to enhancing service delivery. Strategic planning is possibly a part of the wider strategic management practice that relates planning with implementation (Poister et al., [2010](#);

Talbot, [2010](#); Bryson & Edwards, [2017](#); Bryson & George, [2020](#)) and can apply to associations, functions, local, national and international organizations, and places (Albrechts & Balducci, [2013](#)).

Elliott et al. ([2019](#)) conducted a study on “Strategic planning activity, middle manager divergent thinking, external stakeholder salience, and organizational performance: a study of English and Welsh police forces”. The study discussed the impact of higher and lower-level middle managers involved in the strategy process and external stakeholders with implications for future studies. Elliott et al. ([2019](#)) employed survey design using network of structural model and analyzed data from UK police force middle managers, which showed that strategic planning indirectly influenced the performance facilitated by the divergent activity of higher-level middle managers, as well as the salience of external stakeholders. The study concluded that strategic planning activity indirectly contributes to the organizational performance. This is, planning seems to facilitate the higher-level middle managers in playing a more effective strategic role and provides the procedural foundation in which connections with external stakeholders could be made more effective. Consequently, Elliott et al. ([2019](#)) highlighted the benefits of strategic planning activity in three ways. First, the rationale for strategic planning can provide a structure within which middle managers are more prepared to involve in the divergent activity. The study also suggested that middle manager observations of the strategy procedure would influence the involvement in it and this supported the conclusion that strategic planning structures enabled influence at lower levels in the organization (for instance, below the top management team. Second, strategic planning can be the foundation for external stakeholders to play a significant role in collaboration with the organization. Structured, rational decision-making procedures within the organization can minimize the role conflict in managers with strong stakeholders permitting the increased importance of external stakeholders to cause a significant effect on working.

Third, the study’s findings showed that structured strategic planning and more autonomous divergent activity occur simultaneously and they are related. Whereas strategic planning is frequently regarded as a source of top-down control and structure, its procedures could concurrently ease the evolution of strategic thinking at lower levels of the organization, which suggested that the principles of planned emergence or guided evolution are

existing in police forces. Finally, the implications of the study were to focus on the further study factors, which may limit the lower-level managers (officers) performing a more strategic role by the service as a precondition to recognize the value of managers at the lower level. Elliott et al. (2019) made meaningful contributions to the use of public sector strategic planning with an emphasis on the middle manager divergent thinking, external stakeholder salience, and organizational performance. However, they did not pay much attention to core issues of strategic management, its implementation, evaluation, and impact on the delivery of public service in PSOs.

Höglund et al. (2018) conducted a single qualitative case study on strategic management in the public sector: how tools enable and constrain strategy-making. They investigated strategic management, which has been adopted by the Swedish Transport Administration (STA) and its tools currently used in formulating a strategy. Höglund et al. (2018) analyzed micro-processes of strategizing at STA and the results of their study showed that public organizations are required to be conscious of at least three definite tensions such as short versus long-term, parts versus whole, and reactivity versus proactivity which can allow or limit strategic creation. The study also reviewed that these tensions have been manifested to permit or restrain strategy implementation in the public sector. They concluded that the public sector has many precise and distinctive traits that can cause tensions when applying strategic management for practice. Moreover, the authors recommended that more research is required especially at a micro level of case study analysis on strategic practices in the public sector and the tools applied, how they are applied and why. In sum, they suggested that more research is required to consider the precise traits of the public sector regarding strategy work and strategic management (Höglund et al., 2018). However this empirical study is based on a single case study, the findings of which could not be used to generalize public organizations in Sweden and elsewhere in the world. Elbanna (2013) used a survey design to investigate and explore the processes and impact of strategic management: evidence from public organizations in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). He studied the manner in which public organizations crafted, executed, and evaluated their strategic plans and identified the specific strategic management constituents that were most closely linked to their ostensible impacts. Elbanna analyzed 172 practical questionnaires from 67 organizations, the findings of which indicated that the practice of strategic

management has turned to be frequent and standard. Elbanna claimed that strategic management might be the focus of the public management reform in public organizations in UAE over the past few years.

Furthermore, the study of Elbanna (2013) revealed that there was comparatively high consciousness in the use of strategic planning tools and the balance scorecard as framework for strategic planning by both federal and local organizations”. The study also showed that there is very slight difference in the practice of strategic management between federal and local organizations and as a result, the impact of its application are largely useful for the practical implication of strategic management.. Elbanna concluded that the adoption of strategic management processes in the five emirates in UAE is still limited, optional, and does not have much support from the local authorities. This implies practically that the Emirates and other Arab nations that do not know much about the application of strategic management and could learn from experienced sample organizations to avoid the risks are associated with the failure of strategic management application in the public sector. Elbanna made significant and remarkable empirical contributions to the processes and impacts of strategic management in the public sector with emphasis on UAE’s public sector (Elbanna, 2013). However, he did not focus on the effect of strategic management on public service delivery.

Elbanna et al. (2016) studied strategic planning and implementation success in public service organisations: evidence from Canada”. Their study examined the role of formal strategic planning and its influence on the success of strategy execution in a group of more than 150 PSOs in Canada. They analysed the mediating effects of managerial involvement in strategic planning and moderating effects of stakeholder uncertainty on the planning-implementation relationship. The findings indicated a positive link between formal strategic planning and implementation success, which facilitated the managerial involvement in the face of uncertainty of the stakeholders. The study adopted an online survey method (with structured online questionnaire) as its research design using descriptive and inferential statistics to conduct the analysis. The study concluded that the tasks of public managers in strategic planning practices matter for the organization.

From the above review, it could be observed that a number of empirical studies were conducted on the effects of strategic management on public service delivery in both developed and developing countries. However,

much remained unknown about the strategic management and the public service delivery, especially within the African setting, for instance, The Gambia. This study addresses this gap in the extant literature within the Gambian public service environment. This study used a qualitative research design to investigate strategic management and public service delivery in the selected PSOs in The Gambia, West Africa.

Methodology

Research Design and Sampling

The study adopted a qualitative research design by conducting an in-depth analysis of interviews. Primary and secondary data were used for this study. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with senior public servants and beneficiaries of PSOs. The interviewed senior public servants (grades 8 and above) were purposively selected from five (5) public service organizations (PSOs) in The Gambia and comprised: Gambia Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (GCCPC) (2), Gambia Revenue Authority (GRA) (2), National Water and Electricity Company (NAWEC) (2), Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) (2), and University of The Gambia (UTG) (2). The five (5) PSOs were chosen because of their up-to-date strategic plans and related policy documents. PSOs that did not provide up-to-date strategic plans were excluded from the current study. The senior public servants were selected because they were responsible for the strategic plans formulation and implementation, and their roles, proficiency, and experience in the strategic management and public service delivery issues. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with senior public servants and beneficiaries of PSOs in The Gambia. Two (2) sets of interviews were conducted with 20 respondents: The first set of the Interview Guide was administered on ten (10) strategic plan committee members who were senior officers from five (5) PSOs, and the second set of the Interview Guide was administered on ten (10) prominent leaders among the beneficiaries of five (5) PSOs. Secondary data were obtained from policy documents, strategic plans, journal articles and textbooks, and from the Internet sources. These interview data were collected and analyzed by using content analysis. Policy documents were subjected to documentary analysis. The study used interview method and documentary analysis as a way of triangulation for secondary data. Therefore, by considering the selected questions and objectives of the study, this study analyzed the primary and secondary data

as shown in the table below. Table 1 presents the profiles of the interviewees in this study who were considered relevant for the current study.

From Table 1, ten interviews with senior public servants of public service organizations (PSOs) were conducted in The Gambia from January-June 2019. From these respondents, one was a registrar, one a director of human resources and corporate affairs, one was a deputy director of human resources, one was a senior manager consumer affairs, one was an acting corporate planning manager, one was senior human resource officer, one was a senior commercial officer, one was a senior tax officer, one was a principal economist, and one was a principal investigator. Seven of these senior public servants had their Master's degrees in related fields of business administration, public administration, or economics; two had their bachelor's degrees, while one was a diploma holder.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The current study analyzed the obtained data from the in-depth interviews and policy documents by using content analysis and qualitative data analysis and procedures of Creswell (2013, 2014), Hsieh and Shannon (2005), and Downe-Wamboldt (1992). The data analysis of this study were simultaneously done with other activities of the study. Specifically, the data collection, and the documentation of findings were done while conducting interviews, for instance, the researcher was analysing previous interview data, that were included as a narrative in the final report, while organising the structure of the final report. In interpreting and analyzing the data, the researcher had “winnowed” the data (Guest et al., 2012). By focusing on the relevant data and other parts of the data, which were necessarily required for the clarification of data.

Data collected from ten experienced public administrators and scholars were transcribed later for the analysis. The qualitative data were analyzed by coding responses into meaningful classifications, which enabled the researcher to organize large amounts of texts and discovered the patterns that would be difficult to detect by just listening to the audio recordings or reading the transcripts. In this study, the researcher used interview transcripts in coding and compared them with notes taken for validation along with the key issues raised by the respondents with the following major and minor themes of the research:

Table 1*Profiles of Senior Public Servants of PSOs Interviewed in The Gambia*

Interviewee ID	Respondent	Highest Qualification	Position	Interview Date
SPSI1	Senior Public Servant	Master's degree	Director of Human Resources & Corporate Affairs, PURA	15 th Feb. 2019
SPSI2	Senior Public Servant	Bachelor's degree	Senior Commercial Officer, NAWEC	22 nd Feb.2019
SPSI3	Senior Public Servant	Master's degree	Principal Economist, GCCPC	27 th Feb. 2019
SPSI4	Senior Public Servant	Master's degree	Principal Investigator, GCCPC	27 th Feb.2019
SPSI5	Senior Public Servant	Master's degree	Senior Manager Consumer Affairs, PURA	27 th Feb.2019
SPSI6	Senior Public Servant	Bachelor's degree	Acting Corporate Planning Manager, NAWEC	15 th April 2019
SPSI7	Senior Public Servant	Master's degree	Registrar, UTG	26 th April 2019
SPSI8	Senior Public Servant	Master's degree	Deputy Director HR, UTG	7 th June 2019
SPSI9	Senior Public Servant	Diploma	Senior Tax Officer, GRA	12 th June 2019
SPSI10	Senior Public Servant	Master's degree	Senior Human Resource Officer, GRA	15 th June 2019

Results and Discussion

Significance of Strategic Management in the Achievements of PSOs' Goals and Objectives

The respondents were asked to state their views on the significance of strategic management regarding public service delivery, why or why not. All the respondents expressed similar views and consensus of opinions

shared regarding strategic management. The interviewees stated that strategic management is very important because it gives institutions the needed directions and helps them in achieving strategic goals and objectives to improve the service delivery. For them everything works strategically and has a policy; guideline, procedure, and strategy. They emphasized that a strategic plan is very important because it is a blueprint that guides an organization's procedures, processes, and gives the necessary attention to PSOs. It provides guidelines on what needs to be done in attaining their targets, efficiency, and effectiveness in their jobs. Furthermore, the respondents confirmed that an organization without a strategic plan does not have a sense of direction; it must have the vision and mission to attain its goals; strategic management or plan enables a proper monitoring, and measure activities to be implemented to enhance the attainment of strategic goals. They argued that strategic plans implementation facilitated the achievement of PSOs' strategic goals and objectives in the public service delivery. Hence, the interview responses to a great extent, supported the findings of strategic management scholars (Elbanna et al., [2014](#); Kabeyi, [2019](#)) who posited that if strategic decisions are successfully implemented, organizational aims and objectives can be achieved.

Approaches to Strategic Plans Formulation, Implementation, and Evaluation in PSOs in The Gambia

The respondents were asked to relate their organizations' approach to strategic plan formulation, implementation, and evaluation process. The senior public servants had different approaches in their respective organizations. A director of Human Resources at Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) said that

Every directorate is requested to submit its budget and yearly plans with a timeline and organize a retreat. The plan has 6 strategic objectives. Then they compile all the plans and activities with timelines and key performance indicators. The institution aims to achieve these strategic objectives and each strategic objective has a strategic monitoring group that meets every quarter and makes sure the performance indicators and timeline are met by those action officers. They evaluate mid-year to evaluate what has been implemented. A separate committee is set per objective that ensures it is implemented.

Another Director at PURA explained that in formulating their organization's strategic plan, they organized a retreat where each directorate came up with a plan and explained their roadmap in line with the generic strategic plan that has been developed; sets targets on quarterly basis, and implementation is done accordingly. Moreover, one senior public servant at GRA maintained that they developed a draft of the plan through technical services under the auspices of technical director, policy planning, and research. The drafting team comprised of selected senior officers from various departments; then reviewed afterwards, validation, and implementation were done on quarterly and annual basis. Furthermore, another senior officer at GRA buttressed that policy formulations were based on the assignments given by the central government through the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) in collaboration with the policy unit of GRA. A seasoned senior public servant, in person of the Registrar of UTG, succinctly stated that the University's first strategic plan was formulated in 2005; the process was consultative and highly participatory. Consultants were brought from the World Bank and University for Development Studies (UDS) in Ghana, and several workshops and seminars were held in Paradise Suits Hotel and Sindola in Kanilai, where students, staff, and other stakeholders participated. However, he confirmed that the implementation was a bit lacklustre, largely due to the financial challenges, such as certain goals of training of lecturers to Ph.D. level and hiring of professors.

However, another respondent, who was the Deputy Director of Human Resources at UTG, commented on the formulation and implementation of the current strategic plan of the University. He stated that a participatory approach was taken by involving some schools like School of Business and Public Administration (SBPA) of the University and was not done satisfactorily. The respondents argued that the University could have involved all schools during the processes. He confirmed that the strategic plan was yet to be implemented because it was presented to the governing council, but council members had some observations regarding the plan. Moreover, a senior public servant at GCCPC explained the role of these approaches towards strategic plan formulation, implementation, and evaluation process:

We develop the strategic plan in house; we have a team that develops it and comprises key staff, then to the management and shared with the

Board of Commissioners; before it goes to the board it is shared with almost all the staff. With regards to implementation, we do some monitoring quarterly, where each department will send the activities they will do based on what is set in the strategic plan.

Another senior public servant at GCCPC confirmed the above statement by adding that they have reviewed the old strategic plans to know about their short falls, for the new strategic plans. For this purpose, each department came up with activities and themes that were in line with the new strategic direction they wanted to take once they compiled the inputs from all departments, a committee was set up to review the activities of all departments and then shared the first draft with the Board of Commissioners. He added that they formulated a three-year strategic plan internally for the strategic implementation in organizations.

Furthermore, two senior public servants at NAWEC commented in congruence that they formulated both short-term and long-term strategic plans. They agreed to formulate a corporate strategic plan document for 5 years, mostly prepared by consultants and implemented through funding from the World Bank. During the formulation process, they invited independent power producers in terms of electricity but not water. A strategic plan committee did the evaluation in every 6 months. It could be observed from the above comments from senior public servants that PSOs took similar approaches to strategic plan formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes, which were consultative and participatory involving different stakeholders, although the degree of involvement, consultation, and participation differed from one PSO to another. The respondents' positions corroborated the study of George and Desmidt (2016) that a formal and participatory strategic planning process, contributes to the positive outcomes for public organizations. Additionally, the results of the study confirmed the findings of Sawaneh (2021a, 2021b) that PSOs followed formalized strategy implementation and evaluation processes in developing the strategic plans with internal and external stakeholders consulted including the key elements. In addition, Sawaneh (2021b) claimed that “in the process of formulating formal strategic plans, PSOs determined their missions and visions, developed long-term objectives, assessed both internal and external environments, and generated and evaluated strategic choices”

Establishment and Achievement of Strategic Objectives

The interviewees were asked about their strategic plan and establishment targets for the specific objectives of their organizations. This deals with how far has the strategic plan helped the organizations to achieve their targets in public service delivery? There was a consensus of opinions among all interviewed senior public servants regarding the establishment of strategic objectives and targets to achieve them with the help of strategic plans. All respondents' organizations have established specific strategic objectives and targets. All respondents agreed that strategic planning helped public service organizations to achieve their objectives and set the targets during the selected period under review. To this end, a Principal Economist at GCCPC stated:

At the end of every strategic period, yearly we do an assessment by looking at the strategic objectives we set and how many percent we have achieved based on the set strategic objectives. For the past 3 years, we have been scoring between 70-80% of the set objectives in meeting the public service delivery because the strategic objectives were attached to the PAGE (Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment). At the end of every strategic year we do the assessment to take the average.

Additionally, another Senior Public Servant who was the Principal Investigator at GCCPC confirmed that strategic plan has to assess the performance and that enabled them to know or gauge where they had a shortfall. Also, he discussed how to improve implementation issues at least by the end of the year; normally they were able to perform, score very high; and effectively monitor their activities and to know how well or bad they fared in certain aspects of their work. The Principal Investigator added that they have not been able to achieve 100% but scored about 80%.

Furthermore, regarding the establishment and achievement of strategic objectives, a Senior Human Resource Officer at GRA stated that through the Department of Policy Planning and Research at GRA, the overall target of the institution was shared among the departments. He emphasized that GRA has been doing extremely well in the areas of achieving the set targets. This according to him was due to the motivation of staff by paying an extra month's salary for a job well performed. The interviewed respondents supported the assertions of Sawaneh ([2021b](#)) that when PSOs developed a

proper strategic goals and targets and used performance measurement results to track performance, strategic plan objectives could be achieved.

Strengths and Opportunities in Achieving the Objectives of Strategic Plans

The respondents were asked to summarize their organizations' strengths and opportunities that helped them to implement certain strategies. The senior public officers gave different accounts on the strengths and opportunities of their organizations. The Director of Human Resources and Corporate Affairs, and Senior Manager of Consumer Affairs at PURA were of the view that their organization had the following strengths and opportunities. The strengths, which are included but not limited to are given below:

- The law, policy directions, and regulations in place
- competent, well-trained, experienced and professional staff
- willing and motivated staff
- strong financial resources

The opportunities included are given below:

- International cooperation
- Fellowships for training
- Partnerships, collaborations and consultations (partnership with ITU; signed MoU with different authorities: GCAA, Gambia Maritime Transport, and GRA).
- Training and international exposures to learn international best practices
- Availability of consultancies
- Availability scholarships

Moreover, two senior officers from GRA explained that their organization's strengths included a good strategic plan, competent, well-trained and motivated staff (strong human resources base), commitment of top management, government support, and for being the only revenue and tax collection agency in the country. They observed that the opportunities included access to world customs organization (WCO), and West and

Central Africa Custom Organizations (WCA), and access to international donors.

The Registrar and Deputy Human Resources Director at UTG interviewed, were of the view that the University has the following strengths and opportunities. The strengths include being the only public university in the country, a comparative advantage in the sense that it has the reservoir of intellectuals from which the entire nation can tap, and qualified and trained staff (capacity of staff). The opportunities include influencing the government to set up another university when there are deficiencies at UTG to complement its efforts, and there is an opportunity for government to pay attention to improving funding where government cannot engage, the private sector can intervene.

Similarly, the Principal Economist and Principal Investigator at GCCPC recounted that their organization's strengths included qualified and competent staff (most of who had Master's degrees), youthful personnel, a diverse and experienced Board of Commissioners, empowered by the Acts (Competition Act and Consumer Act), the commission is semi-autonomous (which helps in quick decision-making), positive relationships with the ministries, and the National Assembly (lawmakers) and government agencies; and Board of Commissioners. The opportunities included improved relationships with other organizations and concerning consumer protection (we have consumer groups to create consumer awareness), ECOWAS Regional Competition Authority (ERCA) hosted by The Gambia, which gives them the opportunity to train their staff, and build the needed capacity.

Furthermore, two senior officers at NAWEC confirmed that their organization's strengths is that they are the monopolistic provider of electricity and water; a unique provider of energy and water services for the nation; increased water production and electricity, availability of competent staff, and much government support. Whereas the opportunities are, absence of competitors in the electricity and water supply sector, access to renewable energy, and support from international communities especially, the World Bank. It could also be observed from the responses of senior public servants that the Public service organizations had different but similar strengths and opportunities.

PSOs' Strategic Plans Review Process

The interviewees were asked about how often they reviewed their organizations' strategic plans to align with the changes in the environment. All ten senior public servants were of similar opinions: a Director and Senior officer at PURA confirmed that they reviewed their strategic plan annually and in three years to align it with the national blueprint they conducted an annual mid-term review for the monitoring group and reported to the management in every six months.

Two officers at GRA were of the same views that their organization reviewed its strategic plan annually and involves the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA), National Assembly, and other relevant stakeholders during the review process. However, two senior officers at UTG noted that the university did not conduct frequent review session for its strategic plan but reviewed training policy in every three years. Furthermore, two senior officers at GCCPC observed that GCCPC conducted quarterly and annually review its strategic plan to track the progress and productivity, which was planned and achieved through strategic planning. Moreover, two senior public servants at NAWEC confirmed that the organization conducted periodic reviews of its strategic plan based on prevailing circumstances. The interviewees' views validated the conclusions drawn from the findings of Sawaneh ([2021a](#), [2021b](#)) that PSOs reviewed their strategic plans, made commitments to the plans, did both internal and external validation of the strategic plans, and formulated strategic plans to accommodate the environmental changes and the interests of various groups and individuals.

Analysis and Results of Interviews Transcripts of Beneficiaries of PSOs

The qualitative data was obtained from administered interview guide according to the study objectives. Through key informant interviews with the beneficiaries of PSOs in The Gambia it was concluded that the collected data was relevant and up to the mark to conduct the recent study. Table 1.2 presented the profiles of the interviewees or beneficiaries of PSOs in this study, which was considered relevant for the current study. As shown in Table 2, a total number of 10 interviews with beneficiaries of PSOs were conducted in The Gambia from January-June 2019. Of the respondents: one was General Manager, one was Head of Special Products, one was Manager, Wholesale, one was Assistant Fund Manager Contributions, one

was Entrepreneur, one was Student Union's President, and one was Students' Association Deputy Logistics Officer. Of the interviewees, one had a Master's Degree, three had Bachelor's Degrees, and four had diplomas, while two were having WASSCE certificates.

Table 2

Profiles of Beneficiaries of PSOs Interviewed in The Gambia

Interviewee ID	Respondent	Highest Qualification	Position	Interview Date
BPSO1	Beneficiary for UTG	Bachelor's degree	Student President, UTG Students' Union (UTGSU)	1 st March 2019
BPSO2	Beneficiary for UTG	WASSCE	Deputy Logistics Officer, UTG Economics and Management Students' Association (ECOMANSA)	13 th April 2019
BPSO3	Beneficiary for GCCPC	Diploma	Entrepreneur, Cosmetics Manager	16 th April 2019
BPSO4	Beneficiary for GCCPC	Diploma	Wholesale, Gamcel Company Ltd Assistant Fund Manager	12 th June 2019
BPSO5	Beneficiary for GRA	Bachelor's degree	Contributions, Social Security and Housing Finance Corporation (SSHFC)	27 th April 2019
BPSO6	Beneficiary for GRA	Bachelor's degree	Head Special Products, Global Security Insurance Company Ltd	27 th April 2019
BPSO7	Beneficiary for NAWEC	Bachelor's degree	Assistant Manager Customer Relations,	6 th June 2019

Interviewee ID	Respondent	Highest Qualification	Position	Interview Date
BPSO8	Beneficiary for NAWEC	Master degree	GAMTEL/GAMCEL General Manager, Better Future Production Ltd Commercial	18 th June 2019
BPSO9	Beneficiary for PURA	WASSCE	Officer, Gambia Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA)	12 th June 2019
BPSO10	Beneficiary for PURA	Diploma	Marketing Officer, Gamcel Company Ltd	12 th June 2019

The data collected from the interviews of ten experienced beneficiaries (consumers/customers) of services in the PSOs were transcribed, and analyzed by coding responses into meaningful categorizations, which enabled the researcher to systematize huge quantities of texts and uncover patterns that would be hard to notice by just listening to the audio recordings, or reading the transcripts. In this study, the interview transcripts were coded and compared with the notes taken for validation along with the crucial issues raised by respondents with the following major and minor themes of the study.

Impact of Strategic Plans Implementation on Public Service Delivery in The Gambia

The respondents were asked about their experiences of their organization's strategic plans, which have a constructive role in the public service delivery. The responses of the respondents were based on their experience in strategic planning, its impact on efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery. Most of the interviewed beneficiaries confirmed that strategic plans implementation had a positive impact on the public service delivery in The Gambia. Although it did not lead to the expected level of quality service, such as, service delivery was not very impressive or above average because of the lack of proper implementation and evaluation, incompetence, skills gaps in HRM, and inadequate funding or budgetary allocations, political interference, inadequate subvention (where applied), carefree attitude of employees and /or negative employee

behaviour; poor infrastructure/inadequate facilities, insufficient remuneration, low staff motivation, and morale among others.

Moreover, other respondents underscored that good and effective strategic plans implementation had a positive impact on the public service delivery in organizations but without it, there are many negative consequences. They averred that organizational strategic plan are significant because the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery cannot be achieved without a plan. Consequently, the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery depend on the effective and proper implementation of organizational strategic plan. However, no one among the respondents identified a negative impact of strategic plans implementation on the public service delivery. The respondents' positions were in agreement with the assertion of Boyne and Walker (2010) that strategy in the public sector is “a means by which organizations can improve their performance and provide better services”. Equally, the study confirmed the findings of Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003) that strategic planning had an impact on service quality, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness in 71 Welsh local governments.

Service Delivery Levels of PSOs in the Study Area

Under this minor theme, the beneficiaries were asked to assess the operation in their organizations regarding service delivery to the citizens, during the period under review and rate the service delivery level of five public service organizations out of 100%. The interviewees assessed and rated them differently as follows: 49%, 50%, 45%, 35%, and 59% for GCCPC, GRA, NAWEC, PURA, and UTG, respectively. The average rate for two beneficiaries was taken per organization. For example, beneficiary 'A' rated GRA 48%, while beneficiary 'B' rated the same organization 52%. The researcher added 48 and 52 divided by 2= 50%, which is the final rate for GRA. Some respondents attributed this average level of service delivery to numerous problems, which are administrative problems, political interference, strategic problems, failure of central government to solve problems of strategic importance in the public service, failure to communicate properly to consumers/customers, and misplaced priorities among others. To this effect, a beneficiary at NAWEC stated:

Service delivery level in the public sector in general is very poor and NAWEC is not an exception. The service delivery is poor in the sense

that their original mandate or task to deliver essential services, which is water and electricity, they fall short in delivering that service because customers are always displeased with them by numerous factors: some of them are administrative problems, some of them are strategic problems, some of them are central government problems and some of them might even be consumers' problems but failure to communicate properly to them (...). Political interference affected their operations, service delivery and strategic development, because they concentrate on areas that should not be the priority areas.

Another beneficiary at GCCPC expressed similar concerns on PSOs' service delivery:

It was and it is still below the required standards expected by the citizens (...) Citizens are not satisfied with the service delivery level of the organization (...). Their operations are also on the average, not meeting the required standards expected by the citizens (BPSO3).

In a likewise manner, two beneficiaries at GRA stated that GRA has constantly improved, but their services need improvement to enable The Gambia to reach the level of developed nations. This stated that they still fall short of international standards and the services are not satisfactory to some extent. Furthermore, a beneficiary at PURA opines:

They are not efficient. I will rate them poor: 30-40 percent (...) They have to change their mode of operations because according to consumer parliament that I have attended people have been complaining of the same thing over and over again both with Africell and Gamcell and almost all of their operating bodies, and it's like over the years is the same complaint that is been repeated. So it means they are not taking care of those problems; still it comes to another year and it will be raised at another consumer parliament and the same.

Similarly, a beneficiary at the PURA rated the quality of service delivery of the organization between 30 and 40% because the organization had many operational deficiencies. Finally, two beneficiaries (students) at UTG were of the opinion that the quality of service delivery of the organization was satisfactory, improving slowly, but confirmed that the situation was worse during the last ten years. Moreover, they added that some lecturers were very good; they had proper content knowledge and can deliver up to expectations. Conversely, they confirmed that some lecturers

were not good, they lack the pedagogical skills or delivery skills in most lectures, coupled with other challenges, such as, class size , issues of missing grades, inadequate toilet facilities, and ventilation problems, lack of access to research materials, non-conducive environment for learning, no internet access, difficulty in accessing e-journals, no up-to-date library, and the computer lab, which was not well equipped. Consequently, these challenges affected and compromised the quality of service delivery.

However, the students also averred that UTG recorded some notable achievements like the introduction of online registration/portal system, which is Economic Resource Planning (ERP) system, and built infrastructure to house the administrative staff. The introduction of the ERP system made it easy for the lecturers to post students' grades online and enabled easy access to students' grades.

Conclusion

The findings from the interviews conducted revealed that strategic plans of PSOs were formulated, implemented, and evaluated in consultation with both internal and external stakeholders to accommodate the diversified views of influential groups and individuals. Additionally, the study established that PSOs reviewed and effected slight changes to their strategic plans to keep abreast with the environment, during the implementation process. Most of the interviewed senior public servants and beneficiaries of PSOs confirmed that strategic plan implementation had a positive impact on the public service delivery in The Gambia. Although, it did not lead to the expected level of quality service, such as, service delivery was not very impressive or above average. The below-average service quality was due to the lack of proper implementation and evaluation, incompetence, skills gaps in HRM, and inadequate funding allocations, political interference, inadequate subvention (where applied), carefree attitude of employee behaviour, poor infrastructure, insufficient remuneration, low staff motivation, and down morale among others.

The findings of the current study indicated that good and effective strategic plan implementation had a positive impact on public service delivery in organizations but without it, there are negative consequences. The results of the study affirmed that organizational strategic plan is significant because the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery cannot be achieved without a plan. However, no respondent

identified a negative impact of strategic plan implementation on the public service delivery. The paper concluded that strategic management had positively shaped and affected public service delivery in PSOs, strategic plans implementation had a significant impact on PSD, and strategic plans implementation has helped in achieving the goals and objectives of PSOs in PSD in The Gambia.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the current study, the following institution-specific recommendations were suggested:

- (1) GCCPC needs to improve on price stabilisation in the market, ensure fair competition, have a proper monitoring systems to avoid expired products to guarantee that products are fit for consumption. Also, it should involve various stakeholders and other representatives in decision-making process, affecting the competition and consumer issues in the industry to improve the service delivery for the public.
- (2) GRA should engage the grassroots for revenue collection because there are several businesses that evade tax payment. GRA is required to liaise with the business registry to know how many businesses are registered to guard against tax evasion, or tax fraud to improve the tax collection methods.
- (3) PURA should re-strategize and ensure strict regulations especially for the telecommunication and energy sectors to ensure quality and affordable network, water and electricity supply, and guard against unfair tariffs and cheating, and adopt a countrywide awareness creation approach relating to the public utilities.
- (4) NAWEC should adopt demand-driven management style to ensure the energy efficiency, invest more in renewable energy than in the purchase of generators, separate water from electricity and create a water corporation called Electricity Corporation, which will have a collaborative partnership with the independent power producers.
- (5) UTG should create conducive learning environment, build infrastructure, and state-of-the-art learning and research facilities, conduct collaborative research with partner universities; limit class sizes, hire Graduate Assistants and attach them to Professors or Lecturers, and improve on sanitary facilities. The government should

provide UTG with adequate financial resources and prioritise university education in the country.

Implication of Findings

Scholars like Nutt and Backoff (1993), Poister and Streib (1999), Koppenjan (2012), Johnsen (2015), Joyce (2015), George and Desmidt (2016), Bryson and Edwards (2017), Wauters (2017), Ijewereme (2018), and Liddle (2018) have paid attention to strategic management in the public sector; strategic management and public service performance, strategic planning and civil service, governance, public service effectiveness, the NPM, and NPG. However, most of the earlier studies on strategic management and public sector were conducted in western countries with little or no emphasis on the public service sector in The Gambia. Hence, it necessitates further studies on the central government ministries and other public organisations in The Gambia for the purpose of generalisation across the country.

Limitations of the Study

A major problem faced in this study was the bureaucratic procedure involved in getting approval to conduct the interviews for senior public servants of PSOs. The busy schedule and reluctance of some respondents especially, government officials proved to be a major difficulty in getting interviews conducted. This resulted in paying several visits to the offices, places, and homes of interviewees prior to obtaining their consent as well as high cases of re-scheduled interview sessions. However, the necessary interviews were conducted thoroughly. These limitations, nonetheless, have not hindered the realisation of the research objectives, because the inaccessible information was not part of the main emphasis of this study and the results of the findings were not seriously affected by it.

Scope for the Future Research

To advance the frontiers of knowledge about strategic management and planning, the current study recommended that a research should be conducted on strategic leadership in context of the NPM, NPG, and PSD covering the central government ministries and line departments. This would help the project more clear strategic directions to re-engineer and revitalize the Gambian public service for the efficient and effective public service delivery. Moreover, since this study covered only PSOs, future researchers could work on strategic planning in local government

authorities in The Gambia and its effect on social service delivery at the local and community levels.

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