The Impact of Sponsor's Material Support on the Organizational Culture of Selected Private Universities in Nairobi, Kenya

Mutie Wamaitha
KCA University, Nairobi City County, Kenya
wmutie@kcau.ac.ke

Abstract
Private universities often face financial constraints that compel them to rely on sponsors to support their organizational endeavors. Material **s**ponsorship is a common form of support offered by external entities to universities to enable universities improve educational environment. However, material support relationships also feature exchanges in intangible aspects including values, beliefs, and norms of the sponsor as both parties mutually strive to enhance their interests and objectives through the relationship. There are limited studies that specifically assess the impact of material support by sponsors on the organizational culture of higher learning institutions in Kenya. This study investigates the impact of sponsors' material support on the organizational culture of private universities in Nairobi, Kenya. The study adopted quantitative correlational study design guided by the resource dependence theory. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data from a sample of 217 department heads, faculty members, and academic staff from six private universities. The study found material support by sponsors to private universities involved financial support, asset donation, infrastructure development and scholarships and grants. Sponsors' material support had a moderate positive influence on organizational culture in private universities ($r=0.265$, $p<0.001$). The study concludes that sponsors' material support had a positive influence on organizational culture in private universities in Kenya. The implications of the study is that material support through sponsorship has to be encouraged to shape organizational culture in educational institutions towards sustainable growth.

Keywords: Material support, organizational culture, church sponsorship, private higher educational institutions

1. Introduction

Organizational culture is a fundamental component in any organization, which enhances its capacity to gain competitive advantage and sustainable growth. Essentially, organizational culture features a set of core values, philosophies, and symbols shared within an organization, which establish the context for strategy formulation and implementation (Kahiga, 2024). Organizational culture therefore underpins the decisions and actions that companies consider in order to formulate and implement strategic plans aimed at enhancing organizational success. Organizational culture is a dynamic concept, which continuously changes based on the effects of its external and internal environment (Sousa et al., 2022). In the context of higher educational settings, organizational culture is commonly studied to understand various internal and external factors that influence its traditional and strongly institutionalized nature. This suggests that assessing factors that influence organizational culture in higher educational settings is a relevant premise for informing strategic planning towards enhancing competitive advantage and improved performance of educational institutions.

Sponsorship is widely demonstrated as a form of partnership between organizations, which leads to mutual collaborative efforts that intertwine the organizational culture of the sponsor and the sponsored party. According to Simatwa and Odhiambo (2025), church sponsorship is an integral aspect in the management of education in Kenya, which is based on the historical role of missionaries on Kenya's education sector. Fundamentally, church sponsorship involves a multifaceted process in which the sponsoring church becomes an imperative subsystem in an education institution that offers support through governance and resource assistance (Wafula, 2021). The sponsor's material support includes financial contributions, asset donations,

scholarships and grants, and infrastructure investments. This suggests that the involvement of sponsors in educational operations in higher learning institutions entails participation in academic affairs, administrative roles, and student life programs, which further shapes the established organizational culture.

Globally, church sponsorship is a common practice that plays a pivotal role in the growth of Christian private universities, spanning various regions such as the USA, the UK, Asia, and Africa. Historical and cultural influences have shaped the evolution of church sponsorship in the USA, whereby religious doctrines and practices establish the nature of relationship between the sponsoring church and the sponsored educational institution (Kaell, 2020). Similarly, colonialism and missionary endeavors have also influenced the nature of church sponsorship in Asia, whereby most churches sponsor schools with the aim of serving the underprivileged and marginalized individuals in the community (Tachikawa 2018). Ndaita (2023) demonstrated that church sponsorship is a core factor shaping educational standards in Kenya, whereby the church has an imperative role in the development of school curricula.

Despite the significant influence of organizational culture on competitiveness, there is a gap in understanding how church sponsorship shapes the organizational culture adopted in private universities especially in the Kenyan context. This study addresses this gap by assessing how church sponsor's material support impact the organizational culture of private universities in Nairobi, Kenya. The findings aim to inform context-specific insights and recommendations to private universities on how to better align their organizational culture with their Christian values and mission.

2. Literature Review

Private universities in most developing countries are compelled to rely on sponsorship to support their educational operations and processes. Existing studies show that sponsors tend to have their own interests and objectives that influence their initiative to offer sponsorship (Qi et al., 2022; Goduscheit, 2021; Ajayi et al., 2021). Church sponsorship is also shown to influence organizational culture through the premise of the sponsorship relationship, which may involve supporting the implementation of academic programs, such as library resources, in institutions (Ajayi et al., 2021). Moreover, material sponsorship from churches in private universities also include grants and scholarships to students in order to increase student retention while the churches promote its role in offering support to students from poorer backgrounds (Hwang et al., 2021). This suggests that churches use sponsorship as a means of promoting its mission and values to the community, which has the potential of influencing a private university's organizational culture and overall mission to ensure alignment with the sponsor.

Church sponsorship also involves investment in physical infrastructure of learning institutions. Uwimana and Andala (2021) showed that sponsorship to schools helps in supporting a well-designed and well-maintained school environment that offers the ideal conditions for students to discover and nurture their talents. This implies that schools rely on sponsorship as an alternative strategy for securing resources to create an environment that supports academic achievement. In general, the studies show that church sponsorship influences organizational culture in educational institutions wherein support is offered to enhance educational processes. The institutions are further required to preserve the religious and ethical principles established by the sponsors while navigating the ever-changing demands of contemporary higher education.

3. Theoretical Framework

The resource dependency theory (RDT) was adopted to guide this study, which was developed by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) to highlight that organizations are an integral part of their external environment, which influences their dependency of external resources to promote achievement of organizational goals (Jungin & Jae, 2021). In the context of church sponsorship and organizational culture, the RDT shows that private universities are not self-sufficient entities which compel them to rely on external entities, such as churches, through sponsorship relationship that mutually enhance individual interests and missions.

The sponsorship relationship between the church and private universities may entail exchange of intangible elements such as ideologies and norms held by the sponsoring church (Scott & Davis, 2021). The nature of the sponsorship further shape the organizational culture of the university by influencing its mission, values, and educational practices in alignment with the sponsoring church. Church-sponsored universities rely on their sponsoring churches for various resources, including financial assistance, faculty recruitment, student enrollment, and institutional legitimacy.

This dependency establishes a power dynamic wherein the sponsoring church holds significant influence over the university's decision-making processes and strategic direction. Hence, the resource dependency theory is considered relevant in guiding this study on the premise that private universities are likely to engage in sponsorship relationships with the church, as an external entity, which potentially influences their organizational culture as they strive to align their interest with the values of the sponsoring church.

4. Research Methods

4.1 Setting and Participants

A quantitative correlational research design was conducted in six private universities within Nairobi County. The location of the study features a high volume of church-sponsored private universities that would offer diverse insights to determine the effect of church sponsorship on organizational culture in private universities. Specifically, the six church sponsored private universities that were considered for recruitment of study participants and data collection in the study included Kenya Methodist University (KeMU), Catholic University of Eastern Africa, University of East Africa Baraton (UAEB), Kabarak University, Daystar University, and Africa International University.

The study targeted a diverse participant pool of administrative staff in the the selected private universities, which featured a total of 474 senior administrators, deans, department heads, faculty members, academic staff, and support staff. The disproportionate stratified sampling technique was employed to obtain a sample size of 217 study participants.

4.2 Study Measures

Church-based material sponsorship was measured using 16 researcher-developed questionnaire items, whose responses were limited to 5-point Likert scale options in which 1 denoted strongly disagree through 5 to indicate strongly agree. The responses to the items were considered as continuous, which allowed scoring of each participant's responses with high scores indicating high material sponsorship by the church. Organizational culture was measured using the short-form Organizational Culture Survey developed by Denison et al. (2014), which consists of 12

questionnaire items rated on a 5-point Likert scale whereby 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly agree. Similarly, high scores from participant responses indicated strong culture with regard to involvement trait (empowerment, team orientation, capability development), consistency trait (coordination and integration, agreement, core values), adaptability trait (creating change, customer focus, organizational learning), and mission trait (strategic direction and intent, goals and objectives, vision). The scores from the organizational culture traits were aggregated to establish an overall measure of organizational culture.

4.3 Procedure

Ethical approval of this study was initially obtained from KCA University. Research permits were also obtained from relevant authorities prior to conducting the study. Study participants were required to give an informed consent in order to participate in the study. Structured questionnaires were then administered to the study participants, who filled and returned the questionnaire upon completion.

4.4 Data Analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 25) software was utilized for data preparation and analysis. The collected data was summarized through descriptive statistical computations, including frequency distributions, which were interpreted to establish the trend of the responses to each item. Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to determine the association between material support by sponsors on organizational culture of private universities wherein the statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

5. Results

5.1 Demographic Characteristics

The response rate of the study was 99% in which 215 study participants, out of 217, participated in the study. A majority of the study participants were male (148, 69%) with 67 females (31%) also taking part in the study. Regarding staffing category, most of the respondents were administrative staff (146, 67.9%) with 41 (19.1%) faculty members and 28 (13%) working as Deans/Departmental heads in the selected private universities. Majority of the study participants had attained undergraduate level degree (136, 63.3%), 51 participants (23.7%) had a Master's degree while 28 (13%) participants had a doctoral degree (PhD).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency, N (%)
Gender	Female	53 (40.5%)
	Male	78 (59.5%)
Staff category	Deans/Departmental Head	28 13.0%
	Faculty	41 19.1%
	Administrative Staff	146 67.9%
Education level	Undergraduate Level	136 63.3%
	Masters Level	51 23.7%
	PhD	28 13.0%

5.2 Impact of material support provided by sponsors on the organizational culture of selected private universities

Descriptive statistical results showed varying levels of sponsor's material support to the selected private universities. The most common form of material sponsorship involved donation of assets (M = 17.36, SD = 1.877), which slightly differed with financial contributions (M = 17.21, SD = 1.984). Scholarship grants had a slightly lower mean (M = 16.46, SD = 1.792) with infrastructural development support had the lowest mean (M = 16.25, SD = 2.768). The

cumulative material support across all dimensions had an average of 67.28 (SD = 6.690). The findings highlighted that sponsors offered relatively consistent support to universities in various forms, including financial, asset donation, and scholarship with slightly less focus on infrastructure development.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Material Support Dimensions

Dimension	Financial contribution	Donation of assets	Scholarship grants	Infrastructure development	Overall
Mean	17.21	17.36	16.46	16.25	67.28
Std. Deviation	1.984	1.877	1.792	2.768	6.690

The correlational analysis resulted to a Pearson's correlational coefficient of 0.265 that was statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This demonstrated that sponsors' material support had a moderate positive relationship with organizational culture. This inferred that an increase in material support by sponsors led to an increase in the perceived organizational culture in private universities.

Table 3: Correlation between Sponsor's Material Support and Organizational Culture

		Organizational culture overall score	Sponsors' material support - Overall score
Organizational culture overall score	Pearson Correlation	1	.265**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Sponsors' material support - Overall score	Pearson Correlation	.265**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

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

6. Discussion

The study demonstrated moderate positive association between sponsors' material support and organizational culture. The findings concurred with Ajayi et al.'s (2021) assertion that sponsors play a critical role in enabling universities to secure educational resources such as library materials, which significantly enhance the educational environment. The study further support findings by Hwang et al. (2021) that material contributions by sponsors helped in creating a supportive environment that positively influenced the organizational culture adopted in universities. The study underpinned the notion conveyed by the resource dependency theory in which the sponsorship relationship between private universities and the church leads to dependencies that extend from material support to include values, beliefs, and norms. The theoretical implication of the findings is that material support to private universities encourages a culture of stewardship and commitment to the mission of the sponsoring institution (McGahan, 2021; Yu, 2020).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study found that material support from sponsors included financial support, asset donations, and infrastructure investments, which had moderate positive influence on organizational culture of private universities. The study also showed that scholarships and grants as forms of material support had negligible impact on the organization culture, which indicate that while they may benefit individual students, they do not contribute to the broader organizational culture in a meaningful way. Hence, the study concludes that material support from sponsors impact organizational culture of private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. Based on the findings, the study recommends that sponsors offer material support in form of infrastructure development, asset donations, and financial support to private universities in order to strengthen

organizational culture in alignment with the immediate environment. The study also recommends the development of policies that encourage material support to private universities that positively enhance organizational culture and thus overall performance. Future studies may expand the scope of this study to determine the comparative impact of material support in private and public universities, which will help determine potential factors shaping organizational culture in higher learning institutions.

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