

## The influence of innovativeness and pro-activeness on the performance of private colleges in Eldoret town, Kenya

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### Abstract

Entrepreneurial orientation is a significant determinant of the firm growth and performance. This paper explores the impact of two aspects of EO, namely innovativeness and pro-activeness, on the performance of private colleges. The paper is informed by a study conducted to investigate the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and organizational performance of private colleges in Eldoret town, Kenya. The research was guided by the Innovation Theory. Moreover, the research employed the correlational research design. Its target population comprised 220 employees from the private colleges. Stratified random sampling technique was used to sample 140 respondents. From the sample size 22 principals were interviewed. Data from the rest of the respondents was collected by use of questionnaires and interview schedules after testing for their reliability and validity. The collected data was then analysed using both inferential and descriptive statistics. For inferential statistics multiple regression analysis was used. Pearson correlation findings indicated a moderate positive association between innovativeness and organizational performance ( $r=0.503$ ) and a moderate positive association between pro-activeness and organizational performance ( $r=0.584$ ). There was a strong correlation between each of the two dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation (innovativeness  $p$  value of 0.403 and pro-activeness  $p=0.002$ ) and performance of private colleges under study. Therefore, it was recommended that policies towards innovations and pro-activeness should be considered by private college associations and TVET Authority to incorporate innovation policies into the courses offered to colleges.

**Keywords:** innovativeness, pro-activeness, performance, private colleges, Eldoret town, Kenya

### Introduction

The current complexity in conducting business transactions, entrepreneurial orientation (EO) can be regarded as a crucial factor to ensure the success of a business (Achim, Michae & Thomas, 2006) <sup>[1]</sup>. Globalization results in expanded markets, characterized by increased number of competition, and shrinking market size. The global competition, increasing interdependence on rapid technology development, unstable environments, and many other factors exert greater pressure on businesses. In order to overcome the challenges associated with globalization, eminent scholars have recommended that firms adopt entrepreneurial orientation as a solution to the challenges brought about by globalization (Shane & Nicolaou, 2013) <sup>[22]</sup>.

The private sector is the fastest growing segment in higher education in many countries making them victims of global competition (Okwach, Nzomo & Otieno, 2005) <sup>[19]</sup>. They operate under very turbulent and dynamic environments. The extent of business competition and the turbulence facing them coupled with emergence of more matured, better informed and more discriminating customers have pushed the boundaries of organizations to compete at the highest level with the primary focus of becoming the dominant player in the market in which they operate. Competition occurs because existing resources are scarce, opportunities are rare and the dominant players in the market are many (Kangogo, Musiega & Manyasi, 2013) <sup>[9]</sup>.

### Innovation and Organizational Performance

Atalay, Anarfta and Sarvan (2013) <sup>[2]</sup>. have investigated the relationship between entrepreneurial innovations and firm

performances in Turkey. They found that innovation is widely regarded as one of the most important sources of sustainable competitive advantage in an increasingly changing environment, because it leads to product and process improvements, makes continuous advances that helps firms to survive, allows firms to grow more quickly, be more efficient, and ultimately be more profitable than non-innovators. Similarly, Iavoska (2014) <sup>[8]</sup>. have examined the relationship between innovation activity and firm performance in Ukraine. The study found that the relationship between lagged innovation activity and firm performance was actually negative for return on investments and insignificant for earnings before interest and taxes. Performance variables were positive determinants of ability to implement new products. It also found that larger firms tended to launch more number of new products and less diversified firms were more likely to innovate.

Karlsson and Tavassoli (2016) <sup>[10]</sup>. have analysed the effect of various innovation strategies of firms on their future performance in Sweden, captured by labour productivity. Using five waves of the Community Innovation Survey in Sweden, they traced the innovative behaviour of firms over a decade from 2002 to 2012. These researchers distinguished between sixteen innovation strategies, which composed of Schumpeterian four types of innovations; process, product, marketing, and organizational (simple innovation strategies) plus various combinations of these four types (complex innovation strategies).

Ombaka, Machuki, Awino and Gituro (2015) <sup>[20]</sup>. have studied organizational resources, innovation and performance of

insurance companies in Kenya. The study advances the proposition that resources influence performance through the intervening effect of innovation. The proposition is empirically tested using both primary and secondary data from 46 insurance companies in Kenya. The results reveal that both tangible and intangible resources have a statistically significant direct influence on non-financial performance despite mixed findings as regards to the independent effects of resources on various firm performance indicators. Innovation was found to have a statistically significant intervening influence on the relationship between resources and non-financial performance.

### Pro-activeness and Organizational Performance

Pro-activeness is related to initiative and first-mover advantages and to “taking initiative by anticipating and pursuing new opportunities” (Lumpkin & Dess, 2006) <sup>[12]</sup>. Akin to a dictionary definition of “acting in anticipation of future problems, needs, or changes”, Lumpkin and Dess argue that pro-activeness may be “crucial to an entrepreneurial orientation because. It suggests a forward-looking perspective that is accompanied by innovative” and entrepreneurial activity.

Pro-activeness is associated with leadership, and not following, as a proactive enterprise “has the will and foresight to seize new opportunities, even if it is not always the first to do so” (Lumpkin & Dess, 2006) <sup>[12]</sup>. However, being a first entrant into a market is not necessarily a guarantee of a durable competitive pioneer advantage, according to Cahill (1996) <sup>[5]</sup>, but is associated with mixed results. According to Cahill (1996) <sup>[5]</sup>, increased earnings might not necessarily be predictably associated with higher levels of pro-activeness.

This would depend on whether this specific context is appropriate to pro-activeness as a dimension of entrepreneurial orientation (Lumpkin & Dess, 2006) <sup>[12]</sup>. In terms of a specific conception of pro-activeness, Lumpkin and Dess (2006) <sup>[12]</sup>, suggest a conceptualization of pro-activeness as a continuum, whereby the opposite extreme of pro-activeness is regarded as passiveness rather than pro-activeness. Therefore, passiveness is the “indifference or an inability to seize opportunities or lead in the marketplace.” Pro-activeness, however, is associated with a response to competitors, and is therefore different from passiveness. Passiveness is therefore expected to be associated with lower gross earnings due to there being less commitment on the part of a less entrepreneurial, less proactive individual to the development of market share.

Mukami and Karanja (2014) <sup>[16]</sup>, have studied established how entrepreneurial orientation influenced the performance of women-owned enterprises in Kenya. The study found that the key dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation, namely innovation, risk taking, pro-activeness, autonomy in business and competitive advantage, aided the performance of businesses as indicated by the increase in market share and cash flow stability in the business. The research results showed that the cash flow stability increased from 40.5% in 2010 to 61% in 2011 while the market share either increased or remained the same in the businesses under study.

### Statement of the Problem

According to Chandy and Narasimhan (2011) <sup>[11]</sup>, nearly all firms are determined to make full use of opportunities in the product market by the means of visionary, innovative and proactive behaviours which are aspects of EO. The Kenya

Vision 2030 emphasizes the need for appropriate entrepreneurship strategy for wealth creation as one of the means to make Kenya a globally competitive and prosperous nation. Nevertheless, as Maragia (2008) <sup>[14]</sup>, notes, there is a dearth of information about why many Kenyan medium and small scale enterprises, where private colleges are not an exception, do not flourish in their micro and small endeavours. The private college sector is the fastest growing segment in higher education in many countries making them victims of global competition (Okwach, Nzomo & Otieno, 2005) <sup>[19]</sup>. Private colleges which form part of the medium and small scale enterprises (MSEs) are faced by constant threats of failure and most do not graduate into large enterprises (RoK, 2005). Past studies indicate that the MSEs sector in Kenya is characterized by high mortality rate (RoK, 2005); three out of five fail within the first few months of operation (Bowen, Morara & Mureithi, 2009) <sup>[4]</sup>; over 60% fail each year (KNBS, 2012) <sup>[11]</sup>. And most do not survive to their third anniversary (Ngugi, 2013) <sup>[17]</sup>. These statistics indicate a lack of entrepreneurial orientation practices in these private colleges. The essence of entrepreneurial orientation in positively affecting firm-level performance has been postulated by Covin, Green and Slevin (2006), Lumpkin and Dess (1996) <sup>[13]</sup>, Zahra and Covin (1995) <sup>[24]</sup>. However, Auger *et al.* (2003) <sup>[3]</sup>, Smart and Conant (2011) <sup>[23]</sup>, were unable to find a significant relationship between EO and performance. These contradictory research results underscore the need to find out more on the effects of EO on firm performance (Mason & Gos, 2014) <sup>[15]</sup>. Most of the studies conducted on the influence of EO have focused on the developed countries outside Africa. Private colleges in Kenya significantly contribute to the economy, yet there is little empirical evidence available to inform the relationship between EO and performance of private colleges in Eldoret town.

### Materials and Methods

The study employed a correlational research design which sought to obtain information concerning the status of phenomena and to describe what exists with respect to variables or conditions in a situation. The target population was 220 employees of the 22 private colleges in Eldoret town, according to Uasin Gishu County TVET Authority Office Report (2017). The study targeted the 22 principals and 198 teaching staff of these institutions. The sample size was 140, comprising principals of colleges and the staff of the colleges in Eldoret town. The study adopted a stratified random sampling method. A proportionate random sample was selected from each stratum in such a way that each member of the population had an equal chance of being included in the sample.

A structured and pre-tested questionnaire was used to gather primary data both. An interview schedule was used to gather data from the principals of the TVET institutions. The collected data were cleaned to check for completeness, consistency and accuracy to improve the quality. The data was then edited, coded and tabulated. Data was then analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Under inferential statistics, Pearson correlation was computed to establish the nature of the relationship between the variables. Multiple regression was also computed to determine the effect of the independent variable (Entrepreneurial Orientation) on dependent variable (Organization Performance). Descriptive

statistics such as percentages means and standard deviation were also computed.

**Results**

**Innovativeness and Organizational Performance**

Innovativeness as used in the study referred to the tendency for an enterprise to engage in and support new ideas, novelty, experimentation, and creative processes that may result in new products, services, or technological processes. The research sought to investigate the level at which the colleges focused on innovativeness as a means of improving their performance, by probing on the level at which the employees agreed that various innovative practices were implemented in their colleges. The scale adopted indicated that 1 represented strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - undecided, 4 - agree and 5 - strongly agree.

The study findings shown in Table 1 below show that majority (40.7%) of the respondents agreed that there was an emphasis on research and development in their institution while 24.3% strongly agreed. The results also show that 50% of the respondents agreed that the colleges quickly responded to the initiatives of its competitors to keep pace with the market and 30.9% strongly agreed. Moreover, about 56.4% of the respondents agreed that changes in customer preferences for service features are easy to predict.

The study also found that the respondents agreed that staff members are given a chance to participate in contributing new ideas in their institutions (mean = 3.99); and when asked if, relative to their competitors, their company had higher level of innovation, the respondents were in agreement (mean = 3.84).

**Table 1:** Innovativeness and Organizational Performance

Innovativeness Statements		1	2	3	4	5	Total	$\bar{x}$
There is an emphasis on research and development in our institution	F	9	6	34	57	34	140	3.72
	%	6.4	4.3	24.3	40.7	24.3	100	
The college quickly responds to the initiatives of its competitors to keep pace with the market	F	0	0	27	70	43	140	4.11
	%	0	0	19.3	50	30.9	100	
Changes in customer preferences for service features are easy to predict	F	0	17	44	36	43	140	3.75
	%	0	12.1	31.4	25.7	30.7	100	
Staff members are given a chance to participate in contributing new ideas in our institution	F	0	12	20	65	43	140	3.99
	%	0	8.6	14.3	46.4	30.7	100	
Relative to our competitors, our company has higher level of innovation	F	3	3	48	46	40	140	3.84
	%	2.1	2.1	34.3	32.9	28.6	100	

Source: Author (2017)

**Pro-activeness and Organizational Performance**

Pro-activeness is related to initiative and first-mover advantages and taking initiative by anticipating and pursuing new opportunities. Pro-activeness is associated with leadership. Table 2 below presents the research findings on the level of pro-activeness among the private colleges in Eldoret town. The research sought to find out if the institutions introduced new products before their competitors in order to increase their market share; the results showed that the respondents agreed that their institutions introduced new

products before their competitors (mean = 3.84).

They also agreed that the institutions always acted in anticipation of future demands (mean = 4.09). Regarding the introduction of new brands ahead of the institution's competitors, the respondents agreed that they did (mean = 3.76). When asked if their institutions adopted new method of product development which has reduced cost of products and increased profitability, majority (48.6%) of the employees agreed.

**Table 2:** Pro-activeness and Organizational Performance

Pro-activeness Statements		1	2	3	4	5	Total	$\bar{x}$
Our institution introduces new product before my competitors which has increased our market share	F	0	12	30	67	31	140	3.84
	%	0	8.6	21.4	47.9	22.1	100	
Our institution always act in anticipation of future demands	F	3	0	22	72	43	140	4.09
	%	2.1	0	15.7	51.4	30.7	100	
Our institution introduces new brand ahead of our competitors	F	0	18	34	51	37	140	3.76
	%	0	12.9	24.3	36.4	26.4	100	
Our institution has adopt new method of product development which has reduced cost of products and increased profitability	F	0	3	32	68	37	140	3.99
	%	0	2.1	22.9	48.6	26.4	100	

Source: Author (2017)

**Performance of Private Colleges in Eldoret Town**

Performance of the colleges was measured in terms of student growth in the colleges and the market share. The market share

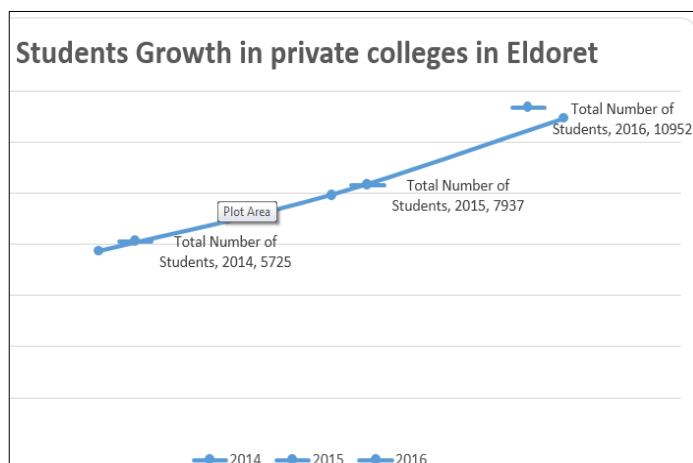
was evaluated considering expansion in terms of the number of branches the colleges have within the country. The findings on performance were as summarized in Table 3 below.

**Table 3:** Performance of private colleges in Eldoret

Colleges		2014	2015	2016	No. of Branches
1	No. of Students	150	200	220	1
	Percentage growth		33.3	10	
2	No. of Students	70	92	100	1
	Percentage growth		31.4	8.7	
3	No. of Students	300	700	1200	2
	Percentage growth		133.3	71.4	
4	No. of Students	350	540	1670	3
	Percentage growth		54.3	209.3	
5	No. of Students	562	752	577	1
	Percentage growth		33.8	-23.3	
6	No. of Students	50	65	86	1
	Percentage growth		30	32.3	
7	No. of Students	150	235	350	1
	Percentage growth		56.7	48.9	
8	No. of Students	530	920	1800	2
	Percentage growth		73.6	95.7	
9	No. of Students	183	237	312	1
	Percentage growth		29.5	31.6	
10	No. of Students	221	258	294	1
	Percentage growth		16.7	12.2	
11	No. of Students	324	358	361	1
	Percentage growth		10.5	0.8	
12	No. of Students	294	325	354	1
	Percentage growth		10.5	8.9	
13	No. of Students	462	527	519	1
	Percentage growth		14.1	-1.5	
14	No. of Students	108	234	241	1
	Percentage growth		116.7	3.0	
15	No. of Students	351	424	473	1
	Percentage growth		20.8	11.6	
16	No. of Students	192	222	246	1
	Percentage growth		15.6	10.8	
17	No. of Students	206	361	462	1
	Percentage growth		75.2	28.0	
18	No. of Students	256	274	343	2
	Percentage growth		7.0	25.2	
19	No. of Students	439	468	493	1
	Percentage growth		6.6	5.3	
20	No. of Students	211	276	337	1
	Percentage growth		30.8	22.1	
21	No. of Students	124	198	209	1
	Percentage growth		59.7	5.6	
22	No. of Students	239	271	305	1
	Percentage growth		13.4	12.5	

Table 3 indicates that all the colleges registered positive student population growth rate in the year 2015, with the lowest being 6.6% growth rate and the highest being 133.3%. In 2016, two colleges registered negative student population growth rate while the rest of the twenty colleges had positive population growth rate. The lowest population growth rate in 2016 was -23.3% while the highest was 209.3%.

The colleges that had only one branch in Eldoret were 18; those with two branches each were 3; while one college had 3 branches. The respondents indicated that for the colleges that had two or more branches, the branches were not necessarily within Eldoret town, but the number of students specified in Table 3 is from the branches within Eldoret town. Consequently, the study sought to examine the growth in the number of students in the private colleges. Figure 1 further illustrates findings on this item.



**Fig 1:** Students Growth in private colleges in Eldoret

**Hypothesis Test Results**

On innovativeness as an aspect of EO, it was hypothesized in the study that there is a significant relationship between innovation and the performance of private colleges in Eldoret town. From the hypothesis test results, the p-value for innovation was 0.040, which was less than 0.05. The research therefore accepted the alternative hypothesis. This implied that there is a significant relationship between innovation and the performance of private colleges in Eldoret town.

Regarding pro-activeness as a dimension of EO, the research hypothesized that there is a significant relationship between

pro-activeness and the performance of private colleges in Eldoret town. Based on the results of the hypothesis tests, the p-value for pro-activeness was 0.002, which was less than 0.05. The research therefore accepted the alternative hypothesis but implying that there is a significant relationship between pro-activeness and the performance of private colleges in Eldoret town.

The results for hypothesis test on innovativeness and pro-activeness and performance of private colleges in Eldoret town were as shown in Table 4 below.

**Table 4:** Hypothesis Test Results on Innovativeness and Pro-activeness

Model		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>			T	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.850	.012		3.881	.000
	Innovation, X1	.159	.033	.105	.956	.040
	Pro-activeness, X4	.285	.079	.399	3.188	.002

**Discussion**

**Innovation and the Performance of Private Colleges**

The study findings revealed that there was a moderate positive association between innovation and the performance of private colleges in Eldoret town (r =value) which was significant (p=.040) at 95% level of confidence. The findings buttress those of Karlsson and Tavassoli (2016) [10], who established that innovation strategies enhanced performance of various firms in Sweden, captured by labour productivity. Using five waves of the community innovation survey in Sweden, they researchers traced the innovative behaviour of firms over a decade from 2002 to 2012. They distinguished between sixteen innovation strategies, which comprised Schumpeterian four types of innovations, namely: process, product, marketing and organizational (simple innovation strategies) plus various combinations of these four types (complex innovation strategies).

Further, the study results were in tandem with those of Ombaka *et al.* (2015) [20], who studied organizational resources, innovation and performance of insurance companies in Kenya. These scholars found out that both tangible and intangible resources have a statistically significant direct influence on non-financial performance despite mixed findings as regards to the independent effects of resources on various firm performance indicators.

Innovation was found to have a statistically significant intervening influence on the relationship between resources and non-financial performance. Further, the research results are in sync with the findings of a study by Atalay *et al.* (2013) [2], who observe that innovation is widely regarded as one of the most important sources of sustainable competitive advantage in an increasingly changing environment.

**Pro-activeness and the Performance of Private Colleges**

The study found a significant relationship between pro-activeness and the performance of private colleges in Eldoret town: r=.584, p=0.584 at 95% level of confidence. These finding corroborate those of Mukami and Karanja (2014) [16], who established that entrepreneurial orientation influenced the performance of women owned enterprises in Kenya. Mukami and Karanja found out that the key dimensions of

entrepreneurial orientation namely: innovation, risk taking, pro-activeness, autonomy in business and competitive advantage aided the performance of businesses as indicated by the increase in market share and cash flow stability in the business. The research results showed that the cash flow stability increased from 40.5% in 2010 to 61% in 2011 while the market share either increased or remained the same in the businesses under study.

However, Cahill (1996) [5], disagrees with these findings in a study that argues that increased earnings might not necessarily be predictably associated with higher levels of pro-activeness. In explaining this variation in findings, Lumpkin and Dess (2006) [12], opine that the relationship between the two variables would depend on whether a specific context is appropriate to pro-activeness as a dimension of entrepreneurial orientation. Further, the variation is explained by the fact that this study did not examine financial constructs of organizational performance.

**Conclusion**

The findings of the research showed that there is a positive correlation between innovation and the performance of private colleges in Eldoret town. The tendency for an enterprise to engage in and support new ideas, novelty, experimentation and creative processes leads to product and process improvements, makes continuous advances that helps the organization to survive, allows the colleges to grow more quickly, be more efficient, and ultimately be more profitable than non-innovators. Moreover, the research indicated that there is a significant relationship between pro-activeness and the performance of private colleges in Eldoret town. Colleges that take initiative by anticipating and pursuing new opportunities are likely to perform well in terms of student population growth and market share.

**Recommendations**

Based on the research findings and conclusion, it is recommended that college owners, staff and students should be trained on innovativeness and pro-activeness through seminars. They should be made to understand that these principles of entrepreneurship have an impact on the

performance and sustainability of their colleges. This study further recommends that colleges should adopt global partner alliances and collaborations to make full use of opportunities in the product market by the means of visionary, innovative and proactive behaviours which are aspects of EO.

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