

Evaluating the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning in educational organization of Kerman

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Abstract

The present paper investigates the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning in education of Kerman from the point of view of the principal and teachers. This is a descriptive survey and the population is composed of the whole principals and teachers of the high schools in Kerman. Proportional to size sampling is applied to select the sample constituted of 70 principals and 200 teachers. A questionnaire including 75 closed questions with the reliability of 0.89 and five open questions is used as the measurement instrument. Descriptive and inferential statistics methods are utilized to analyze the data. The findings suggest that the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning are considered lower than the average level in the steps of designing, monitoring the implementation, assessment and change from the perspective of the principals and teachers. Furthermore, the findings indicate that there is a significant difference between the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the steps of designing, implementing and monitoring from the point of view of the principals and teachers according to their education degree. However, this difference is not observed in the assessment and change steps. The results also show that there is a significant difference in terms of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in strategic planning based on the positions of the principals and teachers in the design step. Furthermore, it is found that this difference is not observed in the implementation, monitoring, assessment and change steps. We also conclude in the monitoring level, there is a significant difference between the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats based on the gender. This difference, however, is not documented in the design, implementation, assessment and change steps.

Keywords: Strategic Planning, Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats, SWOT analysis

Introduction

Lack of transparent, precise and measurable planning for the future is the topic which has been much debated in the fields of management and planning. The future seems to be highly uncertain and vague for the whole society even the directors and the planners. In terms of Ken Coax, the future might be planned and the individuals can make their future by themselves. Perceiving the future desires and the whole concerning aspects and characteristics, the beginning point is identified correctly and the barriers and the weaknesses are identified and the path to achieve the goals are developed by principal and logical steps. However, the vagueness of the goals and the failure of the consensus and wisdom in this context will lead to have a society intertwined with boredom and there will be a lot of concerns in the surrounded operations. Unfortunately, not knowing what we want is the problem of our society. Therefore, developing a strategic plan and extending the plan over different levels of management might be the foundation of the fundamental future plans (Sobhani, 2006). Recent ideas of strategic planning are more concentrated on the future mobility, flexibility, organizational awareness, creativity and potential movement from the strategy to the format change (Dories, 2003). Strategic planning is defined as the process of identifying the internal and external environment, making decisions about the mission, developing general aims of the organization, creating and selecting comprehensive strategies in order to achieve the goals and allocating the resources to attain the organizational objectives (HerlieJal, 2008; quoted by Kafi and Izai). SWOT analysis (strength, weakness, opportunity and threat) is a tool in strategy formulation

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by identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a given organization. Awareness about these points in a firm is a good foundation for developing strategy. Additionally, SWOT analysis provides a framework for developing strategies based on an appropriate compound of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Rauch, 2007, p 413). Generally, strategic planning is a bottom-up approach based on the main issues and realities because it takes the probable and unpredictable events into account. This approach is opposed to the top-down approach in which the principals or the directors of the central branch plan for the organization (Hambright and Diamantes, 2004).

In the recent years, the strategic planning in the education systems of different countries has been known as a perfect achievement. Applying the strategic planning gives the planners an opportunity to seek for the improvement of the society in the present and future. This type of planning is a dynamic process providing effective approaches and tactics for fulfilling the intended objectives in the future. Complexity and elegance of the decision making process in educational institutes make the strategic planning an essential affair. In this step, it is not intended to improve the considered linear process step by step. However, the goals, prophecies, intentions and the practice pattern for fulfilling the objectives are developed by participating the whole educational practitioners. Strategic planning endeavors to create a better future and it is not the only reflection of the current crisis and issues. This planning is prospective and aims at a better future (Khalili Shourini, 2003).

The philosophical roots of the strategic educational planning associated with the educational reform movement are laid in the teaching excellence. Based on the conceptual barriers of the educational policy (i.e. The social, economic and political barriers), the strategic planning of the education should try to resolve the internal and external limitations and utilize this perceive in establishing the strategies (Robert V *et al*). Strategic educational planning means defining a better future and trying to make it happen which is known as one of the significant topics in the recent years of the 21st century (Kafman and Herman, 2004). Undoubtedly, the scientific and technological evolutions around the globe are the products of the planings, physical investments and the struggles of the scientists and the experts of the world. The contribution of the education in the advanced educational systems in creating and sharing the modern technology is entirely known by everyone. The advanced country is the one in which there is an efficient, improved, flexible

and dynamic educational system established (Abdollahi, 2002). The challenges and the opportunities of the educational systems are increasing annually. There is a constant need to attain much value from the available resources. Additionally, the decisions and the selections of the institutes are always getting more complicated. All these steps are essential in the strategic planning (Nichols, 2000).

Taking a closer look at the concept of the strategic planning, its necessity becomes clear. According to the environmental changes and the complexity of the organizational decisions, the requirement of applying a comprehensive plan has been highly clarified. This plan is nothing but the strategic planning. This type of planning is depicted as the process in which the audiences, stakeholders and the creditors draw a future for the organization and develop the necessary guidelines and operational programs. Due to several reasons there is a need to change the attitudes in the educational planning. These reasons include the quick variations in the environment and the inefficiency of the traditional methods of educational planning in responding to the numerous educational issues. Consequently, attitude changes in educations seem necessary. Strategic planning in industrial fields have been frequently utilized. Additionally, several studies are conducted in diverse organizations and industries. There is, however, much attention paid to the application of strategic planning in other sections including governmental and non-for-profit, cultural and educational entities because the experiences of the manufacturing departments about the strategic planning have provided valuable resources for its application in other departments. Therefore, an extension of the educational system depends on its conversion to the program language because the educational activities become practical when they are converted into the quantitative and applicable policies in terms of the predefined strategies. This would contribute to the educational policy and provide the possibility to merge the educational planning with the development plan. In Iran, however, there is no specific developed educational planning. This requires the development of the perspectives, philosophies, goals and priorities. Due to the lack of an intermediate link, the conducted operations are not sufficiently integrated (KhaliliShoreini, 2003). Aghasi (2003) tried to examine the situations of the strategic planning in the Isfahan educational system. The findings related to the mean comparisons (elements of non-concentration, knowledge, managerial information and qualitative studies) re-

veals that these elements differently impact the strategic planning. Additionally, it was found that strategic thoughts in terms of the respondents had the highest impact and the participation agreement had the least impact. She also concluded that the gender, position, education level and working background caused the respondents to provide different responses. Rigger (1994) studied the advantages, disadvantages and barriers of the strategic planning and found that the main problems return back to the stakeholders and those who interfere in the planning process. The author also believed that the main deficiency of the educational leader and the planning process derives from the lack of awareness of the group processes, organizational dynamics and cognitive requirements. Davis and Elision (1998) examined the prospective and the strategic perspectives in school planning and found that the schools have changed the short-term educational development in the long-term strategic planning. They also developed a new model which should be responsive to the needs of the educational planning in future.

Hambright and Dimantis (2004) analyzed the popular patterns of strategic planning in education system. They provided an analytical analysis about the strategic planning and its main characteristics in public educational operations. Their findings about reviewing the expert literature reveal that the operations and the plannings become different because of the variations in the main missions. Additionally, a number of the strategic educational plannings are reflections of the models of the participative plannings in terms of the processes and the attitudes.

Jasparro & Johnson (2006) examined whether the strategic planning is considered as a valuable effort. The results showed that the interviewed principals agreed that the strategic planning deserved the devotion of the efforts, investments and time in their states. They also announced that the main reasons of the strategic planning in their areas are the concentration and direction of the operations. They also believed that the strategic planning allowed them to develop brief and clear intentions and goals for the improvement and growth of the teaching and learning processes. The principals also reported that there were specific improvements through implementing strategic planning in their areas:

Furthermore, Hambright & Diamantes (2004) investigated the advantages and barriers of the strategic planning of K-12. They found that those principals of the local schools who required the implementation of the strategic planning processes at-

tained very few samples of the operational and strategic plans. Due to the lack of the empirical bases or sufficient literature, the relationship between the methods and the tools of the strategic plans is not obviously identified. Consequently, it is interpreted that there is no joint conceptual framework for the strategic planning of K-12.

The following questions are investigated based on the above mentioned points.

Research Questions

1. In terms of **designing**, what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning from the perspective of the principals and the teachers?

2. In terms of **implementation**, what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning from the perspective of the principals and the teachers?

3. In terms of **monitoring**, what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning from the perspective of the principals and the teachers?

4. In terms of **assessment**, what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning from the perspective of the principals, teachers and the experts?

5. In terms of **changes**, what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning from the perspective of the principals and the teachers?

6. Is there any differences between the perspectives of the principals and the teachers in terms of the above schemes based on the demographic factors?

Methodology

This is a descriptive survey and the population is composed of the principals and the teachers of the high schools in Kerman. The principals constitute of 393 males and 386 females. The teachers also constitute of 3452 males and 4241 females. Using proportional to size sampling, the sample size estimated to be about 200 teachers and 70 principals. A questionnaire is used to collect the required data and includes 75 closed questions based on Likert scale and five open questions by the researcher. To determine the validity, the opinions of the experts in terms of the education and management have been employed. To analyze the data in descriptive and inferential levels, SPSS software is applied.

Results

Table 1 compares the mean scores of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning process in the design step with the average of the third assumption from the perspective of the principals and teachers.

Table 1. Mean scores of strategic planning process in the design step

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Error	T
Strengths	98/2	941/	065/	220/-
Weaknesses	79/2	874/	060/	46/3-
Opportunities	90/2	887/	061/	58/1-
Threats	75/2	882/	061/	9/3-

According to the findings in table 1, t value is lower than the critical value at the level of five percent. Therefore, the strategic planning process in the design step has been considered less than the average level.

Table 2 compares the average scores of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning process in the implementation step with the average of the third assumption from the perspective of the principals and teachers.

Table 2. Mean scores of the strategic planning process in the implementation step

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Error	T
Strengths	88/2	943/	065/	72/1-
Weaknesses	77/2	782/	054/	22/4-
Opportunities	84/2	980/	067/	32/2-
Threats	75/2	922/	063/	82/3-

According to the findings of table 2, t value is less than the critical value at the level of five percent. Therefore, the strategic planning process in the implementation step has been considered less than the average level.

Table 3 compares the average scores of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the monitoring process in the implementation step with the average of the third assumption from the perspective of the principals and teachers.

Based on the above table, t value is less than the critical value at five percent of significance. Consequently, the strategic planning process in the monitoring step has been considered less than the average level.

Table 3. Mean scores of the monitoring process in the implementation step

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Error	T
Strengths	87/2	944/	065/	90/1-
Weaknesses	76/2	778/	053/	28/4-
Opportunities	82/2	908/	062/	81/2-
Threats	70/2	965/	066/	37/4-

Table 4 compares the average scores of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the monitoring process in the evaluation step with the average of the third assumption from the perspective of the principals and teachers.

Table 4. Mean scores of the monitoring process in the evaluation step

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Error	T
Strengths	85/2	907/	062/	24/2-
Weaknesses	78/2	897/	062/	50/3-
Opportunities	88/2	936/	064/	84/1-
Threats	77/2	903/	062/	67/3-

The table above confirms that t value in the table is less than the critical value of five percent and it shows that the strategic planning process in the evaluation step is considered less than the average level.

Table 5 compares the average scores of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the monitoring process in the change step with the average of the third assumption from the perspective of the principals and teachers.

Table 5. Mean scores of the monitoring process in the change stage

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Error	T
Strengths	83/2	904/	062/	71/2-
Weaknesses	70/2	801/	055/	37/5-
Opportunities	88/2	817/	056/	11/2-
Threats	73/2	839/	058/	58/4-

The table above indicates that t value is less than the critical values. Consequently, the strategic planning process in the change step is considered less than the average level.

Conclusion and Discussion

This section provides the final analysis in terms of the research questions. Based on the studies con-

ducted in Iran and foreign countries and using the different Internet sites, we found this is the first study in this field.

According to the findings about the comparison of the means of the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning process in the design step from the perspective of the teachers and principals, it is found that the observed t of the strengths, weaknesses and threats is less than the critical value. As a result, there is a significant relationship between the opinions of the principals and teachers in terms of their education degrees ($p \leq /05$). Furthermore, it was found that there is a significant association between the opinions of the principals and teachers in terms of their positions and there is no significant difference between the opinions of the female and male principals and teachers.

Based on the analyses of the first question from the perspective of the teachers and principals, t value is less than the critical value in the table. Consequently, the strategic planning process in the design step is considered less than the average. In other words, the average scores of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning process in the design step are considered less than the average level from the perspective of the principals and teachers.

The second research question: In terms of implementation, what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning from the perspective of the principals and the teachers?

Based on the findings about comparing the average scores of the strength, weakness, opportunity and threat of the strategic planning process in the implementation step from the perspective of the principals and teachers, t value is less than the critical value at 0.05 significance level. Therefore, there is no significant difference between the opinions of the principals and teachers in terms of their positions. Additionally, there is no significant difference between the opinions of the female and male principals and teachers.

Based on the analyses of the second research question from the perspective of the teachers and principals, table 2 and the experts of table 7, t of the critical values is less than the error level. Consequently, the strategic planning process in the implementation process is considered less than the average. Stated another way, the average scores of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the strategic planning process in the implementation process is considered less than the average level from the point of view of the teachers, principals and experts.

The third research question: In terms of monitoring, what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning from the perspective of the principals and the teachers?

Based on the findings related to comparing the average scores of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning process in the implementation process from the point of view of the principals and teachers, it was found that there is a significant difference between the opinions of the principals and teachers in terms of their education degree ($t=2.44$). By comparing the average scores of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning process in this step, it was found that the opinions of the principals and teachers are significantly different in terms of their positions. Furthermore, there is a significant difference between the opinions of the female and male principals and teachers ($t=2.15$).

According to the analyses of the third research question from the perspective of the principals and teachers, it was recognized that the strategic planning process is considered less than the average in the monitoring step.

The fourth research question: In terms of assessment, what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning from the perspective of the principals, teachers and the experts?

The findings related to the analysis of the average scores of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning process in the assessment step from the perspective of the principals and teachers indicate that there is no significant difference between their opinions in terms of their education degree. Comparing the average scores of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning in this step, the t value is higher than the critical value shown in the table. Consequently, there is no significant difference between the opinions of the principals and teachers in terms of their positions. Additionally, the opinions of the female and male teachers and principals are not significantly different.

The fifth research question: In terms of changes, what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning from the perspective of the principals and the teachers?

The results show that the opinions of the principals and teachers are not significantly different in terms of their educational degree. Based on the comparison of the average scores of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the strategic planning process, it is found that there is no significant difference between the opinions of the principals and

teachers in terms of their positions. Furthermore, the opinions of the female and male teachers and principals are not significantly different.

The analyses of the findings related to the fifth research question reveal that t value in the table 5 is less than the critical value at 5 percent. As a consequence, the strategic planning process in the change step is considered less than the average. In other words, the principals and teachers consider that the average scores of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the strategic planning process in the change step are considered less than the expected average of the third assumption.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are provided:

- Designing and developing a strategic planning by participating the officials through establishing the expert meetings
- Participating the whole stakeholders in developing strategic planning through establishing the training seminars
- Establishing the training periods and workshops for the principals and decision makers to en-

hance their ability in describing the strategic issues and designing the strategic planning

- Changing the attitudes of higher education officials towards the importance and necessity of the strategic planning of approaching training workshops by the university professors
- Creating the suitable contexts for the better identification of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the strategic planning process in educations by conducting similar studies.

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