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## THE INFLUENCE OF PROGRAM DIFFERENTIATION ON MARKET PERFORMANCE OF PRIVATELY OWNED TVET COLLEGES IN KENYA

As the higher education environment has become competitive, the higher education institutions have equally increased their competitiveness for students in the recruitment market. Concurrently, higher education institutions are repositioning themselves by trying to offer courses that are “marketable” to not only fill the employment gap but also to guarantee a good return on investment. Theoretical literature points out that firms employ differentiation strategy to be unique in its industry along some dimensions that are widely valued by buyers and, hence, obtain competitive advantage. However, the extent to which they develop unique products for their students through differentiation had not been examined before in the context of private Technical and Vocational Education and Training institutions in Kenya. Therefore, the objective of this paper was to analyze the effect of programs differentiation on market performance of privately owned colleges in Kenya. Guided by the Porter’s Generic Strategies theory, the study employed descriptive survey design targeting 267 privately owned TVET colleges drawn from 25 counties across the country selected using the cluster sampling method. Data for the study was obtained from the colleges’ management through questionnaires and interview schedules and analyzed using descriptive statistics which included frequency, percentage and chi-squares. The inferential statistics were mainly Pearson product moment correlation and multiple linear regression analysis. The findings revealed that college programs differentiation did not significantly affect market performance of privately owned colleges in Kenya. The indifference to the programs differentiation strategies in the colleges was largely informed by the evolving needs of the learners with respect to building their careers, as opposed to having several course options. The study, therefore, recommends that the privately sponsored middle level TVET colleges should move away from the need to carry out homogenous marketing fearing costs and instead adopt the much productive differentiated approach that provides uniqueness to programs and caters for specific needs.

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