

STRATEGIC POSITIONING OF THE PRIVATE AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN RIO GRANDE DO NORTE-BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyze the strategies of Private institutions and positioning for higher education (IESP) of RN, using the following tools: life cycle of the institutions; Segment of the IESP; Porter's Generic strategies; Array of strategic positioning and Institutional Placement. Quantitative and qualitative research were undertaken through searches in databases of INEP and MEC and in email addresses of IESP, besides visits to all institutions surveyed, creating an overview for each tool used in the study. The results showed that the two main Institutions stand in the market in relation to the excellence of the courses, three institutions seek to highlight from the perspective of the consumer through price, and on a third block, with that alternated good and bad results and who obtained poor analysis, requiring better planning of actions to face the competitive market.

Keywords: Higher Education. Positioning Strategies. Strategic Tools

Introduction:

Higher education in Brazil is characterized as a sector in expansion. Between the period of 2000 to 2011, the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) rose from 1,180 to 2,365. In relation to public HEI, the institution number jumped from 176 entities to 284 while the number of private HEI increased from 1.004 to 2.081.

This scenario is visible in the State of Rio Grande do Norte, where the number attendance IES went from 8 to 25 and the number of courses jumped from 152 to 377 courses. In addition, the number of vacancies offered by public HEI increased from 11,905 to 29,224, representing an increase of more than 245 percent in the State. The number of tickets in higher education in the State during the same period rose from 11,290 to 20.928, corresponding to an increase of approximately 185%.

The growth in the number of vacancies offered by HEI in

Rio Grande do Norte, together with the increase in the number of institutions, indicates a tendency towards a promising scenario for organizations that operate in this segment in the State. However, analyzing in detail the scenarios, the current panorama reports the existence of idle vacancies caused by the difference between the number of vacancies offered and the amount of students who join in the institutions.

As organizations inserted in an increasingly competitive market, the private HEI are conducted to perform frequent modifications looking advantages, seeking to increase their participation and prominence compared to competitors. Without a strategy, the private HEI will not achieve the goals and objectives defined by their managers and, consequently, may affect social factors of the State through economic education and low rates.

In this way, is outlined the problem of research as being strategic positioning choices adopted by public HEI of the

State of Rio Grande do Norte to cope with the expansion of the higher education sector. This research aims to analyze the strategic positioning of private HEI and in-person at the RN on the basis of the tools linked to strategic management: life cycle of an institution (ADÍZES, 2004); Segment of higher education institutions (GARCIA, 2005); Porter's generic strategies (1986); Strategic Positioning matrix (FREITAS, 2004); and Institutional Placements (CAVALHEIRO, 2006).

According to Mintzberg (1998) and Mintzberg *et al.* (2003), a strategy is the pattern or plan that integrates the main goals, policies and sequential action of the Organization into a cohesive whole. Ansoff (1990), for its part, considers that the strategies are operating policy expressions that, within a system of administration, manage to define operational criteria upon which the strategic programs are designed, and deployed.

Another highlight, Porter's Generic strategies that can be used by any company and type of business unit to create a leading position on the market, and is thus classified as generic and divided into: (1) leadership in total cost; (2) differentiation; and (3) focus. Each of the generic strategies traverses a path essentially distinct competitive advantage, as described by Lambert and Lee Jr. (2009), combining a choice about what kind of advantage with the competitive scope or strategic target that must be reached (OLIVEIRA *et al.*, 2008).

According to Porter (1986), the competitive advantage of a company starts the value that it can create for consumers, bypassing the manufacturing cost. Also claims that the fundamental basis of above-average performance in the long run is the sustainable competitive advantage, achieved on the basis of low cost and differentiation. Differentiation, by focusing on the product offered, adopts the perspective of the customer, and only when the person realizes some feature that adds value to the product. And scope, by force in the market served, adopts the perspective of the producer, existing only in the collective mind of the organization - in terms of how it spreads and desegregate their markets (MINTZBERG *et al.*, 2003)

According to Moraes and Zilber (2008), the strategies of cost leadership and differentiation means how the company will compete, while the general strategy of focus is related to where the entity will compete. Adopt one of the generic strategies means seek competitive advantage. However, following the three strategies at the same time the company performs below average, meaning the absence of any competitive advantage. Oliveira *et al.* (2008) States that use the three strategies has no competitive advantage, as they compete with the leaders of each generic strategy: cost; with products that have the best differentiations; and with the best placed companies focused on the specific thread.

Method:

The method used in this work was the case study. The approach is qualitative and survey was based on interviews with managers of companies with the intention of

observing and information that assisted in the analysis of institutional positioning on the market. This research used data bases of the Ministry of education and electronic addresses of 10 HEI to quantify the information about the scenery in the State.

The technique of open interviews, which serves mainly exploratory purposes, was used for the detail of questions and more precise formulation of related concepts. The interviewer presented the theme and the interviewee had freedom to digress on the subject within an informal conversation, and the interviewer's interference was minimal as possible. Points out that the name of the institutions was omitted; in this article, they are presented as **I₁**, **I₂**, **I₃**, (...) and **I₁₀**.

The array of segment of IES (GARCIA, 2005) compared the Institutions divided into four segments, according to the value of the monthly payment and the amount of students according to the criteria: elite Institutions, dream, quadrant quadrant of nightmares and institutions of mass, assuming that the target audience segmentation is a tendency for various sectors of the economy.

Porter's Generic strategies were used by sorting the generic public HEI, and divided into: total cost leadership, differentiation and focus.

The array of strategic positioning, in which the public HEI were classified, defines the strategic positions adopted to survive the competitive market that meet. Array variables are defined as Academic Excellence and innovativeness. The array of positioning is an analysis tool that enables you to identify how an institution is positioned in front of your competitors, taking into account the key industry indicators, as well as enabling the management of this Executive consensus build IESP regarding a future positioning (FREITAS, 2004). Addressing the peculiarities of the higher education sector, the tool that brings the Strategic Positioning matrix allows you to check the ability of innovation versus academic excellence.

With the increasingly significant increase in the number of institutions operating in the higher education market, maximizes the concern in relation to Institutional Positioning of the brand with potential consumers. For Oliveira *et al.* (2008), even if a private college can't be remembered as thinking by the target audience, you should be aware that the same always associate any image she and so many others on the market.

Results:

Of the ten Institutions examined, six were accredited and initiated the activities of higher education in recent ten years. The **I₂** and the **I₁₀** work for 30 years in the market of the State, in contrast with the **I₄** that has only four years of operation. Eight public Universities offer only a campus / drive (locale) students and potential customers, while the **I₅** and **I₁₀** distribute the courses in three and four campuses/units, respectively, showing geographic advantages in customer choice.

The ten public HEI offer a total of 20.754 annual vacancies, 126 undergraduate courses, representing an

Table 1:

Comparison of the IESP: year of accreditation; academic organization; number of units; number of students at graduation; amount of undergraduate courses; research and extension activities; number of students in the graduate; link to high schools; partnerships with companies; and IGC.

IESP	I ₁	I ₂	I ₃	I ₄	I ₅	I ₆	I ₇	I ₈	I ₉	I ₁₀
Accreditation Year	2004	1981	2001	2007	1998	2002	2005	2003	1997	1981
Academic Organization	Colleges									Univ.
Number os Units	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	4
Total number of Annual Vacancies of all Graduation Courses	300	2960	200	1950	1550	1950	1410	1480	1430	7524
Quantity of Graduation Courses	2	21	2	8	9	8	14	7	13	42
Monthly fee value of the Administration course (in R\$)	336	498	239	355	359	398	352	169	434	367
Reaearch and Extention Activities	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Quatity of post-graduation courses	10	16	6	23	13	0	0	0	25	64
Vinculated to the high school network	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Partnership with Companies	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
IGC	2	3	2	No	3	2	No	3	4	3

Source: research data, 2011

Table 2: Classification according to the Porter’s Generic Strategies

	I ₁	I ₂	I ₃	I ₄	I ₅	I ₆	I ₇	I ₈	I ₉	I ₁₀
Cost										
Monthly Fee under the average	x		x					x		
EAD					X	x		x		x
Does not encourage the scientific initiation			X				x	x		
Marketing directed to the low price			X	x				x		
Little diversity of courses	x		X							
Diversification										
Invest in research and extention activities	x	x		x	X	x	x		x	x
Has specific labs for the courses	x			x					x	x
Carries out Exchange and partnership with companies			x	x					x	x
Has IGC equal or superior to 3		x			x			x	x	x
Monthly fee above the average		x				x			x	x
Focus										
Theme institution					X					

Source: research data, 2011

average of 164 seats per course. The I₁₀ stands out by providing the greatest diversity of options, with 42 graduated and 64 post-graduated.

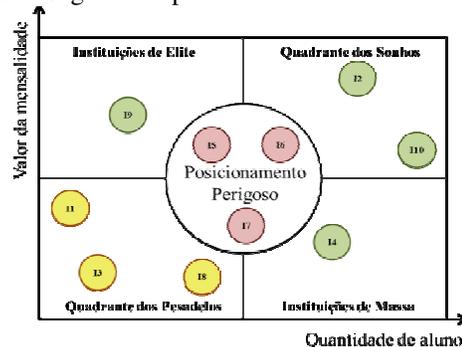
Another important fact is that four of the ten institutions (I₁, I₂, I₃ and I₉) have ties to high school networks. Thus, the focus at the time of capture of students, by IESP, faces to formed the network linked. Other four IESP analysed belong to national and international groups of higher education.

The institutions I₁, I₃ and I₆ have the lowest values of IGC (General index of courses), that indicates the quality of all the undergraduate, master's and doctoral degrees from HEI (MEC, 2011b), corresponding to two concept. The largest amount of institutions studied (I₂, I₅, I₈ e I₁₀) IGC has 3 concept. Only the I₉ presents IGC equal to 4, the greatest value of public HEI in Rio Grande do Norte.

Discussions:

The HEI were classified in relation to the amount of annual vacancies offered undergraduate courses and the value of the tuition fees, in an array, Picture 1.

Picture 1: Segment of private HEI and face-to-face in RN



Source: García (2005) adapted with data from the research, 2011

The only institution classified as elite quadrant is the **I₉**, which has the second highest monthly value and offer courses such as law and administration.

In addition, it presents the most IGC (equal to 4). It is an IESP which offers a number of slots lower than the market average and the second highest monthly value of course.

The institutions **I₂** and **I₁₀** were classified in the quadrant of dreams. The first has a value of higher tuition (1.42 times) regional market average. The **I₁₀** has the largest number of slots offered to students and has the fourth largest monthly fee. In addition, they are the most traditional of the market, both appeared in 1981 and offer the largest amount of courses (21 and 42, respectively). The **I₉** was classified as an elite Institution for acting for greater supply of jobs with the highest tuition. Classified in the quadrant of the institution, the **I₄** presents monthly fees below the market average and seeks to increase the amount of students, reducing unit costs and benefiting from an economy of scale.

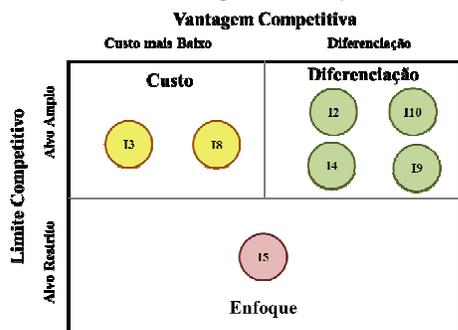
In the quadrant of nightmares, were classified the IESP **I₁**, **I₃** and **I₈**, considered relatively new and without tradition in the market. The **I₁** and the **I₃** offer the least amount of annual vacancies and lower tuition rates. The **I₈** has the absolute lowest price on the market, about 2 times smaller than average. With the lowest prices and the best selection of slots, these institutions find themselves in a situation of danger, running the risk of not having the capital to carry out its routine activities.

Three Institutions - **I₅**, **I₆** and **I₇** have a dangerous position by standing out from all the other quarters, by the proximity of both the average number of vacancies as the value of the tuition, meaning that they do not seek to Excel in any of the quadrants.

Other data were obtained for the classification of public HEI according to the Generic Strategies of Porter, table 2.

It is noticed that the Institutions **I₃** and **I₈** present the characteristics of the generic cost strategy, being that the **I₈** offers distance learning mode-EAD, decreasing the cost of the physical structure. Use the value of the tuition below the market average as a focus of marketing and do not invest in research activities, as well as offer less diversity of courses for the market.

Picture 2: Generic Strategies used by the IESP in RN



Source: Mintzberg et. al. (2003) adapted with the research data, 2011 The Institutions **I₂**, **I₄**, **I₉** and **I₁₀** are focused on diversification strategy. They are investments in research and extension activities, were evaluated by the MEC with

IGC above 3 and the value of the tuition is higher than the market average. In addition, the institutions **I₉** and **I₁₀** offer the possibility of exchange agreements and through partnerships with businesses.

Despite the general strategy of diversification, the **I₄** has the IGC indicator 2 concept, which means that current practices are not being efficient to increase performance of the institution, not a competitive advantage.

The only institution that has a focus strategy is the **I₅** which back the marketing to inform potential customers that the institution stands out from competitors by offering courses focused on two thematic areas: law and business, not having a policy get cost-competitive advantage through differentiation.

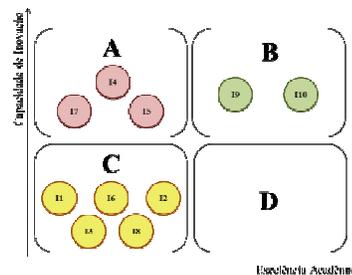
The other Institutions (**I₁**, **I₆** and **I₇**) are in a dangerous position, because they did not stand out with features in only one of the three generic strategies and therefore present no competitive advantage in the market.

The **I₁** practice fees below the market average and the smallest variety of courses offered, factors that would lead one to believe that the chosen strategy is the cost. However, even with these characteristics, the company invests in research and extension activities, seeking diversification of services offered factors to attract potential customers.

The **I₇** offers a wide variety of courses, though not make investments in no difference as specific laboratories and extension or research activities. This institution still has the value of the monthly close to market average.

The data in table 2 were used also for the classification of IESP Quadrants A, B, C and D of the array of public institutions Danson positioning (Picture 3).

Picture 3: Array of strategic positioning of IESP in RN



Source: Freitas (2004) adapted with research data, 2011

The institutions **I₄**, **I₅** and **I₇** were framed in the A quadrant, which features a low academic excellence, but high capacity for innovation. These organizations present themselves as a characteristic amount of courses offered close to market average. Although the institutions have not yet **I₇** and **I₄** concept in the IGC were classified in this quadrant due to, also as with the **I₅**, by investing in research and extension activities, having a diversity of courses and specific laboratories for the courses. However, do not exhibit the same results and have the same size of IESP that stand out in the market.

The Institutions **I₉** and **I₁₀**, both in the B quadrant, carry out investment in research and extension, partnerships with

Table 3: Institutional Positioning of the IESP

Institutional Position	I ₁	I ₂	I ₃	I ₄	I ₅	I ₆	I ₇	I ₈	I ₉	I ₁₀
Geografic										
Multi campuses offer					x					X
Excelence										
Has IGC equal or superior to 3		x			x			x	x	X
Has specific labs for the offered courses	x			X					X	X
Does it invest in research and extension activities?	x	x		X	x	x	x		X	X
Price										
Offers the monthly fee under the market average	x		x					x		
Uses the marketing directed to the low price			x	X				x		
Tradition										
Long market time		x			x				x	x
Uses marketing to highlight the tradition of the institution					x				X	x
Trade Mark differential										
Uses the trade Mark as a main differential of the student graduated by the institution	x			X	x	x			X	x

Source: Reasearch data, 2011

Table 4: IES General Analyzes

	IES Segments of Acting	Porter’s Generic Strategies	Strategic Positioning matrix	Institutional Positioning
I ₁	Nightmare	Do not have competitive Advantage	C	Price
I ₂	Dream	Differentiation	C	-
I ₃	Nightmare	Cost	C	Price
I ₄	Mass	Differentiation	A	Trade Mark and Tradition
I ₅	Dangerous	Focus	A	Geografic and Tradition
I ₆	Dangerous	Do not have competitive Advantage	C	Tradition
I ₇	Dangerous	Do not have competitive Advantage	A	Trade Mark
I ₈	Nightmare	Cost	C	Price
I ₉	Elite	Differentiation	B	Excelence, Trade Mark and Tradition
I ₁₀	Dream	Differentiation	B	Geografic, Excelence, Trade Mark and Tradition

Source: Research data, 2011

companies and market tradition, being considered as HEI that have high academic excellence and innovativeness. Are traditional in the market, with more than 14 years of accreditation with the MINISTRY of EDUCATION, relying on traditional courses and recognized for quality. The values of the tuition of two HEI are above the market average, and even then, the amount of vacancies offered by entities remains high.

The I₁₀ has the greatest diversity of courses on the market for the private sector and has the largest geographical range. These facts, combined with strategic partnerships with companies, lets sort it on quadrant B.

The biggest quatity of Institutions from the sample (I₁, I₂, I₃, I₆ and I₈) is in quadrant C, characterized by low innovative capacity in the market and low academic skills. The I₂ is one of the first accredited IESP next to MEC, however is not included in the current market pace,

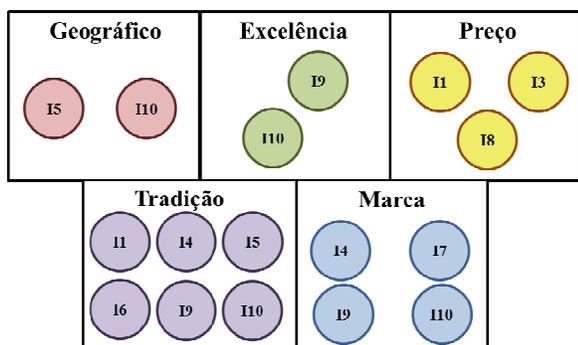
without partnerships with companies or provide Exchange students, not seeking to create new units to increase the radius of the geographical range.

The public IES I₁, I₃ and I₆ have the lowest value of the General indicator of progress, of number 2, but do not seek to follow the trends and changes that occur in the market. Offer only one unit, with low amounts of different courses. C quadrant positioning is worrisome, because these IESP have low evaluation in IGC and, anyway, are not seeking to adapt to the market through innovation and planning activities.

Table 3 allows you to analyze the public HEI in relation to Institutional Positioning tool.

To show its positioning, the IESP were grouped in accordance with Picture 4.

Picture 4: Institutional placement of private HEI and face-to-face in RN



Source: Research data, 2011

The IESP **I₅** and **I₁₀** can use the strategy to stand out in the market for the supply of various units, although not all courses are offered in all units. Potential customers can choose the institution and the course, for convenience. However, neither this factor addresses such as marketing CONTROLLER IESP, failing to inform customers with something that could be considered decisive at the time of choice.

The Institutions **I₉** and **I₁₀** use another strategic positioning according to the excellence, focusing their actions on improving the level of quality of the courses offered with IGC equal to four and three, respectively.

The strategy to achieve the institutional placement according the price is adopted by the institutions and **I₃**, **I₁** and **I₈**. Do not invest in research and extension activities, and offer distance education mode, focarando low price marketing. However, the **I₁** does not use this differential in advertisements.

The strategic positioning from the tradition is used by IESP **I₁**, **I₄**, **I₅**, **I₆**, **I₉** and **I₁₀**. The **I₁**, Despite having seven years on the market, uses the tradition of the school network which is part, which is more than 80 years working in the education sector, to marketing. For institutions **I₄** and **I₆**, the tradition transmitted due to the higher education group. While the **I₅** and **I₁₀**, that are more than 12 years on the market, use this long time of expertise to highlight tradition, considering it as a competitive advantage against the newest in the regional market.

As a diferencial for the brand, the institutions **I₄**, **I₇**, **I₉** and **I₁₀** want to stand out in the market that these students be differentiated at the time makes the IESP compete to job vacancies.

The **I₂** does not have the characteristics of any institutional positioning defined and, therefore, does not find the competitive advantage to win the competition.

Table 4 allows you to view how each institution was framed according to the characteristics of the tools reviewed.

The **I₃**, **I₁** and **I₈** Institutions have as competitive advantage the value of monthly fee lower than the market average. Are all classified in quadrant C Strategic Positioning matrix, i.e. do not have high academic excellence or innovation capacity, preferring to try to pick up students by the low price of tuition.

The institutions **I₉** and **I₁₀** have competitive advantage over the excellence of its courses and market tradition. This allows these INSTITUTIONS to differentiate themselves from the other by having ability to innovation, academic excellence and student demand even with above-average monthly value of the market.

The **I₆** was the only one with negative results in all tools. So, it's up to this IESP check how you want to stand out against competitors, because according to the methodology used in this work, this institution does not present a positioning strategy.

The four Institutions that complement the 10 analyzed, **I₂**, **I₄**, **I₅** and **I₇**, alternate good and bad results in the used tools.

Both institutions use the positioning strategy of excellence (**I₉** and **I₁₀**), possessing IGC equal to 4 and 3, encouraging research and extension activities and with the majority of teachers possessing a Masters degree. Prominent Institutions are on the market, with tuition above average values of the market are compatible with the physical structure, with the realization of benefits to students through partnerships and with the tradition.

The institution **I₆** presents one of the greatest monthly market values, prioritizes hiring teachers with master's degrees and invests in research and extension activities. However, features one of the smallest values of IGC, low innovative capacity, little diversity in offering undergraduate courses and uses the tradition of the group to which it belongs to stand out against competitors.

Four private IES (**I₂**, **I₄**, **I₅** and **I₇**) satisfactory and unsatisfactory results in the alternate set of analysis from the tools used in this research, since, according to some tools, positioning and strategies, according to others, don't stand out in the market.

Related to the institution **I₂**, IES is the one that stands for the highest monthly value of the market and the high number of slots offered to students, as well as seeking to differentiate themselves by investing in quality. However, does not show notability in relation to competitors in relation to the capacity for innovation and academic competence and institutional placement.

In similar situation, the Institution **I₄** stands with a high capacity for innovation, investment in order to increase the quality of the institution and, even so, presents value of courses below the market average.

The competitive advantage of the **I₇** was highlighted during the review of the capacity of innovation, although it is in a dangerous situation in the segment of the IES and does not have a strategic positioning according to analysis of Porter's Generic Strategies.

The **I₅** succeeded, according to Porter's Generic strategies, present competitive market advantage by focusing on their courses in two specific areas. Invests in innovation capacity, however has a dangerous position in the segment of the IES.

Acknowledgement:

The authors would like to thank FAPERN and MCT/CNPq for funding this research under the Program Firs Project.

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