

# Composition and Practices of Secondary School Boards of Management: Lessons from Kenya

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**Abstract** Research provides evidence that school management is the second most important factor that influences students' achievement after teaching quality. The management sets the conditions under which teachers work. In Kenya, the composition and the responsibilities of secondary school Boards of Management (BOMs) is enacted in the Basic Education Act of 2013. This article analyses the composition and practices of the BOMs based on recent researches. It focuses on the BOM members' training, skills and competence and performance of their responsibilities. The paper is a theoretical desk-top review of literature on composition and practice school management in Kenya. The findings show that, in some of the school boards, there is blatant breach of guidelines. For instance, some of the BOM members had primary school education as their highest academic qualification against policy. Further, findings indicate that training of the BOM members is not given a priority as required by policy. It is recommended that composition of the board must strictly adhere to government policies. It is also recommended that there is need to train BOM members on policy interpretation, strategy formulation and financial management for them to ably manage schools. This review is important to education theorists and practitioners, and other stakeholders in the field of education.

**Keywords:** *composition of school boards, school board practices, secondary school management, student achievement*

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## 1. Introduction

Management is the art and science of getting things done through others. Management of secondary schools involves processes and practices designed and established by legislation to realise set objectives and deliver effective services at the school level [1]. School management is important as practices of effective boards have been found to have a strong correlation with high students' achievement which is the reason for existence of schools [2]. Research has also found management to be the second most important factor that influences students' achievement after teaching quality as it changes teacher behavior by setting the conditions under which they work [3,4]. These findings have challenged the traditional assumption that only teachers and administrators play the key role in influencing student performance [4].

In Kenya, after independence, Boards of Governors (BOGs) were created by the Education Act in 1966. The BOGs were to manage public secondary schools on behalf of the government as a more direct link between the central ministry and secondary schools. Their responsibilities were defined as overseeing school management in general.

However, Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012 recommended that the government should establish Boards of Management (BOMs) in place of BOGs to reflect the latter's new functions and enlarged participation in school management [5,6]. The BOM has far more influence and power to make important decisions affecting the quality of education provision in schools in Kenya.

## 2. Composition of Secondary School Boards of Management (BOMs) in Kenya

Public secondary school BOMs are supposed to consist of 14 members appointed by the County Education Board (CEB) namely: six persons appointed to represent the parents' body or the local community; three persons to represent the sponsors of the school; one person to be nominated by the County Education Board (CEB); one person to represent special interest groups in the community; and one person to represent persons with special needs. The composition also includes one teacher to represent the teaching staff in the school and one ex-officio to represent the students' council.

In Article 56, sub-section 2 of the Basic Education Act, the Board of Management (BOM) is allowed to co-opt a person from time to time; whom it is satisfied possesses experience and skills that would assist in the discharge of the Board's functions. The law allows BOMs to co-opt up to a maximum of 3 members at any one time, raising the number in the Board from 14 to 17. The co-opted members, however, do not have a right to vote at the meetings of the board [5]. The Basic Education Act also stipulates that BOMs should have a meeting after every four months.

The number of members in a secondary school board in Kenya was challenged by the Task force which looked into the cases of fire reported in learning institutions that saw structures in more than 100 schools destroyed in 2016. As a result, the Ministry of Education then proposed a change of law to regulate the number of people who can sit in schools' boards of management from seventeen to nine to provide for a more effective way of managing schools and cut down on cost (Task Force Appointed to Probe School Strikes, 2016). According to Cabinet Secretary for Education then, each of these people demand to be paid allowances or refunded transport thus being costly to the school some which were having financial challenges.

Literature from other countries indicate that a school board may consist of five, seven or nine members, depending on the size of the school (Associated School Boards of South Dakota, 2012-2013). In Namibia, the number is pegged on the number of students. Nevertheless, a school board should consist of not less than 5 and not more than 13 voting members [7].

In England, Northern Ireland and Wales, school governing bodies have mandatory five members consisting of: at least two elected parent, the head teacher, one elected staff governor; one local authority (LA) governor. The board appoints as many co-opted governors with skills or experience necessary to carry out the functions of the governing body as is appropriate. However the co-opted members must not exceed one third of the total number on the board. They do not have to have a specific connection to the school or local community. Faith based schools are allowed to appoint foundation governors, nominated by the appropriate religious body [8]. The government can rely on such literature and other practices of effective boards to review downwards the number of board members in each individual school from 17 for effective school management and to cut down on unnecessary costs.

Empirical evidence also shows that the appointment of BOM members in many public secondary schools falls below the standards articulated in the law and policy frameworks. For instance, in terms of gender, board members in many schools have been found to be male-dominated. Studies have established that due to cultural factors that generally perceive women as incompetent in managerial roles, women do not volunteer for leadership positions and thus the Boards have a big percentage of males [9,10,11]. Ojwang's [12] study established that even some selection panels in teacher replacement had no women representatives yet the Constitution of Kenya (2010) is clear on the third gender rule. Article 81(b) the Constitution of Kenya indicates that not more than two

thirds of the elective public positions shall be of the same gender.

There is also a slot allocated by the Basic Education Act [5] for one person to represent special interest groups in the community. That has also not been implemented in majority of the schools. In the reviewed studies, none of the Boards had persons of special interest being part of the respondents. Again, majority of the board members who responded were aged between 40 and 50 years [9,11]. In Mkongo's study, (2013) the board members were aged between 51 and 60 years. This shows that the youth had not been represented well in the school Boards of Management.

The age factor could be explained by the fact that the youth may not have interest in secondary school management as at that age their children are young and not in secondary schools. Nevertheless, it is clear from the foregoing literature that affirmative action programmes and policies meant to address past discrimination against women, the youth and persons with disabilities have not, to a great extent, been adhered to in the composition of BOMs in secondary schools in Kenya.

Academic qualifications also form a crucial part of competence among BOM members. The Sessional Paper (2000) recommended that BOM members should be appointed from among persons who have qualities of commitment, competence and experience. Further, the Basic Education Act stipulates that in appointing persons as members of a Board of Management, the nominating and appointing authority shall observe and respect: (a) the ethnic and regional diversity of the people of Kenya; (b) impartiality and gender equity; and (c) Article 10 and Chapter Six of the Constitution.

It was surprising to learn that, in some schools, some of the board members had primary school education as their highest level which was a breach to guidelines [13,14] (Akinyi, 2017). Also, Nzoka and Orodho [15] and Abaya [16] found that most members of the BOMs did not have managerial skills probably because of their relatively low level of formal education as some were primary school leavers. This brings the question as to whether such members had competencies required to interpret the policy documents in regard to school management. It is important to note that many of the researches indicate that some of the BOM members had secondary school certificate, diploma and degree levels of education which was commendable but they lacked skills and competencies needed to manage secondary schools.

In earlier studies, done before the inception of Basic Education Act (2013), there was indication that the appointment of BOM members in most public secondary schools was influenced by political leadership who often manipulated the process to perpetuate their interests. This practice had negative influence on the management of schools as BOM functions were subverted to suit the interests of political leaders (Kindiki, 1999 and Ondundo and Rambo, 2012).

The *Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya, which came up with the Koech Report* [17] had also expressed concern about political influence on the selection and appointment of BOM members. Such findings have not been established in the recent literature reviewed on BOM members' appointments. This could be

attributed to the fact that the Basic Education Act of 2013 assigns the work of constituting the BOM to the County Education Board (CEB) unlike earlier on when the appointment was a process done by a selected committee, comprising of provincial administration, local leaders, members of Parliament and councilors, school sponsors, local education officers and principals (Sessional Paper No.6 (Kamunge, 1988). Nowadays, the politicians have no role in the appointment of the Board of Management in secondary schools in Kenya.

### 3. Boards of Management Members' Training and Practices

Although the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI) [formerly Kenya Education Staff Institute (KESI)] was set up in 1981 to provide in-service training for managers of educational institutions, BOM members have not benefitted from the facility due to resource constraints and lack of clear policy on their training. KEMI is currently providing such services on a commercial basis to both the public and private sectors, and that is only done on request for such services from the institution(s) concerned. The approach has made it hard for schools to raise required fees for training of the school managers. Most of the schools are experiencing financial difficulties [18]. However, there was some evidence that some BOMs were organizing for their own training outside KEMI [19,20].

The County Director of Education is mandated by the Basic Education Act Sub-section 54(7) (2013) to co-ordinate capacity building and development for Boards of Management but induction and training of the BOM members is not given a priority by the Ministry of Education (MOE) as required by this policy. During inauguration, the County Education Officers (CEOs) briefly induct the BOM members on their duties and responsibilities. This has been found to be inadequate to fully introduce them to the work procedures and rules and regulations governing the operations of the BOM in public secondary schools.

A number of Sub-County Education Officers (SCEO) interviewed by Kerubo [21] felt that the guidelines were self-explanatory and hence did not require any formal training and this may be the reason as to why the officers are not being keen on training BOM members. Leaving BOMs to learn on the job as it is now the case, leads to errors that stand in the way of curriculum implementation. However, a number of researches have contrary findings. Nyakundi [22] indicates that board members were not conversant with policy documents which limited them from making informed decisions during execution of their roles. Mukongo (2013) observed that BOM members were found prone to manipulation by some unscrupulous principals because of difficulty in articulating the legal implications on some of their resolutions. There, thus, seems to be a gap in interpreting the legal documents which govern decision-making and policy formulation, yet there is no evidence of efforts being made to train board members on the same.

*The Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya* had pointed out that the management of

educational institutions in Kenya remained weak because most members were deficient in supervisory competencies to utilize available information for management purposes (GoK, 2000). Onderi and Makori's [23] study opined that the roles and responsibilities of BOMs have not been matched with appropriate training. As a result, their effectiveness is hampered by lack of understanding, knowledge and skills as some of the members are left frustrated and sometimes embarrassed because they fail to follow procedures that are consistent with the regulations and the laws.

It is, thus, recommended that the areas related to school laws and regulations should be strengthened as the responsibilities require an understanding, appreciation, and application of legal and ethical principles to school leadership. It should be noted that parents as well as citizens' organizations are opting to use the courts to deal with schools which may breach the code of regulations. In order to respond appropriately to these issues, the Ministry of Education should provide the relevant training to get school boards better informed and more prepared.

Training in strategy formulation was also found to pose a major challenge to the members of the boards as there was no formal training of school leaders [24]. The boards could thus not be effective in formulating strategic plans. Most schools were found to be operating under school development plans since very few of them had developed strategic plans [25]. Evidently, other schools had visions, missions and core values set out and displayed on notice boards or open walls but not documented [26]. The fact that schools were operating without strategic plans was an indication of lack of quality management, which may jeopardize the provision of quality education services, leading to low students' achievement. Therefore, there is need to organize workshops and seminars to train the school managers on strategic planning.

Financial management has been and still is one main area which researches have found fault with the way BOMs manage it. The Basic Education Act (2013) gives BOMs a duty to receive, collect and account for all funds accruing to the school but several concerns are still being raised. For instance, Mutinda's (2014) study observed that although majority of the chairpersons of the boards were graduates, they lacked skills specifically in budgeting, accounting and auditing procedures. Further, Athman's [13] study established that BOM members did not have financial management skills and were not active in soliciting for grants, donations and bursaries. They were, however, found to be greatly involved in preparation and approval of school budgets, analyzing monthly trial balances, discussing audit reports and organizing fundraising activities.

In the area of human resource management, the BOMs of secondary schools have a duty to advise the CEB on the staffing needs of the school; and recruit, employ and remunerate non-teaching staff as required by the school in accordance with the Basic Education Act. The BOMs also have a duty to attend to the discipline of teachers and workers (Basic Education Act - Republic of Kenya, [5]).

Kenya decentralised teacher recruitment policy in public secondary education in 2001. As a result, the BOMs are used to recruit teachers as the policy became school-based [27]. Research agrees that positive outcomes

have been realized which includes more teachers being employed in hardship areas. This has resulted to teachers being retained in those areas as one has to stay for a period of five years before seeking for a transfer. The policy has also led to equality in teacher distribution. In Wainaina's [14] study, majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the recruitment of teachers should remain under BOM as it is based on merit. Before implementation of this policy, Aloo et al [27] and Kipsoi and Sang [28] had found that teacher recruitment policy was tribal, corrupt and biased and not based on merit.

Wainaina [14], however, established that majority of BOM members were not competent to handle the recruitment which necessitates training and development of these members. As far as students' discipline was concerned, majority of researches reviewed indicate that the main methods used were involvement of parents and guidance and counseling. Methods such as suspension and expulsion of students from school had been discarded as they were considered a waste of study time and which had negative influence on students' academic performance [29]. In terms of student strikes, incapacity of Boards of Management was one of the more than 50 reasons that the Task Force appointed to probe school strikes in 2016 in Kenya pointed out as being behind the unrest.

The Basic Education Act (2013) is clear that BOMs should provide proper and adequate physical facilities and materials for secondary schools. Orodho et al (2014) established that the quality of learning was directly impacted by lack of school facilities especially instructional resources. Different researches have different results on the provision of physical facilities and teaching and learning materials by BOMs. An analysis of physical facilities by Atieno [30] found out that teaching and learning materials (TLMs) were available. Teaching and learning materials tended to be adequate and minimally shared especially in the compulsory subjects [13,31,32]. In an effort to boost the same, the Ministry of Education, at the beginning of 2018, started distributing teaching and learning materials mainly text books to all secondary schools in the ratio of 1:1 for the compulsory subjects. Even the other subjects that are not compulsory gained from the same project as it was being done in phases. Thus, it can be said without doubt that the text books in public schools in Kenya are adequate for teaching and learning.

Earlier researches like those of Atieno [30] and Mutinda [9] had showed an over-stretch on physical facilities which had a negative influence on academic performance of students at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). All schools in the researches reviewed were found to have inadequate facilities and materials such as classrooms, toilets and offices for heads of departments, dormitories, playgrounds, libraries, laboratories and school equipment. The BOMs were, however, making effort to ensure availability of physical and material facilities. Kindiki [31] found that the BOGs were involved in getting support for instance through the Constituency Development Fund (CDF).

In an effort to supplement government efforts of enhancing teaching and learning resources, Namuyu's [32] study findings established that BOMs had taken up to provide desks, fence the school compound, hire volunteer teachers, and even construct and renovate classrooms. The

BOMs also maintained the available physical facilities in the schools besides providing adequate water and electricity. They also approved the school projects [13]. However, most of the schools lacked well-stocked libraries. Only few of them had school libraries. The remaining schools had their books being kept in the Deputy Principals' offices and students and teachers were allowed to borrow them for use [29].

Interestingly, Odundo and Rambo's [20] study found disparities in training in terms of school type as a bigger percentage of participants serving in national schools had been trained, while only a very small percentage of those from extra-county and county schools had undergone training but majority of them had not. At sub-county schools, again a small percentage were of the teachers were found to have been trained.

## 4. Conclusions

In view of this foregoing discussion, it is concluded that:

1. Management of the appointment of BOM members by County Education Boards in strict adherence with the Basic Education Act has reduced political interference in school management.
2. In some school boards, there was breach of government guidelines since some of the BOM members had primary school education as their highest academic qualification.
3. The number of people who serve in each individual school Management Boards (17) is too big and this has proved to be an impediment to effective school management.
4. The one-third gender rule has favoured the males in the composition of the school Management Boards.
5. There are no adequate training opportunities for BOM members as required by the policy and this has constrained their competence and effectiveness as school managers.

## 5. Recommendations

This paper recommends that:

1. The Ministry of Education, through the County Education Boards, should strictly adhere to all prescribed guidelines and also ensure that all BOM members meet the minimum required academic qualifications to serve in as school board members.
2. There is need to review downwards the number of board members in each individual school from 17 for effective school management and to cut down on unnecessary costs.
3. It is important to uphold the one-third gender rule and consciously encourage females to offer themselves and/or campaign to occupy more slots in the school Management Boards.
4. There should be regular and adequate training opportunities for the BOM members on policy interpretation, strategy formulation and financial management for them to acquire and/or develop their competences and effectiveness as school managers.

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