

## **Boards of Managements' Student Welfare practices and their Influence on Academic Performance: The Case of Two Counties in Kenya**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Students are a key component in any school, and their ability to learn is greatly influenced by the way the school Boards of Management cater for their welfare. This article sought to find out the status of Boards of Management (BOM) members' student welfare management practices in Kitui and Makueni counties in Kenya. The study targetted 10,010 BOM members and principals (4,563 BOM members and 351 principals from Kitui and 4,732 BOM members and 364 principals from Makueni counties). Krejcie and Morgan table, systematic random, census and purposive sampling techniques were used to sample 54 principals (27 from each of the two counties); and 709 BOM members (354 from Kitui and 355 from Makueni), bringing the total sample size to 763. An interview schedule was used to collect qualitative data from principals whereas questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from the BOM members. The results obtained indicated that BOMs were highly involved in students' welfare management practices with a mean score of 3.63 and 4.09 in Kitui and Makueni counties, respectively. Qualitative data corroborated these results. Simple linear regression indicated that practices of BOM members on students' welfare influenced the students' academic performance. This study recommends that the capacity of the BOM members on students' welfare practices should be improved for them to be more effectively in carrying out this critical role.*

**Key Words:** Boards of Management, Management Practices, Students' Welfare practices, Student welfare, Academic Performance, Kenya

## **Introduction**

The school system is a person-processing organisation which develops children for adult roles (Kivanc, 2014). The learner is the key focus and remains the most precious resource, not for use, but to be shaped (Maduewesi, 2005). For that matter, those who take care of the learners in the institutions should predominantly be concerned with the entire students' welfare which is measured in the form of emotional, mental health, their conduct/behavior and their safety.

Students' welfare in schools encompasses everything the school community does to meet creation of a safe school environment where students are nurtured as they learn. It also encompasses effective students' behavior strategies, preventive health and social skills, and educational services to support students (Keeling, 2014). Welfare also implies the emotional and intellectual wellbeing of students (New South Wales Government, 2022).

Students' academic performance, on the other hand, is measured through an examination or a test. The results are obtained at the end of the basic education cycle examination (Odeh, Oguche and Ivagher, 2015). The scores that the students attain in an examination are seen as an essential measure of performance ([Bouchamma, 2012](#)). Thus, out of necessity, academic performance has become the top priority in secondary schools due to its overall contribution to the social-economic development of any country (Chua and Mosha, 2015). This is the reason why academic performance caught the attention of this research.

Students' welfare activities and academic performance are among the many tasks assigned to the Boards of Management (BOMs) in secondary schools. BOMs are the corporate bodies responsible for management of secondary schools in majority of the countries in the world (DfE, 2020; Hickcox, 2014). For instance, in USA boards are charged with students' welfare practices such as receiving reports on the progress of students, and progress made by the school in addressing the goals and objectives established for the school year ([Bouchamma, 2012](#)). Saskatchewan School Boards Association (2015) advises that such reports should include trends, successes and areas requiring improvement. The data provided, and the feedback received by the boards guided new policy and direction ([Bouchamma, 2012](#)).

Barth (2011) indicated that for boards to achieve their mandate on students' welfare, they needed to engage in data-based decision-making in issues related to students. Through application of data, continuous improvement would be achieved. Use of data involved collecting, analysing, reporting, using data for school improvement and communicating through data. That way, boards knew whether students' achievement gaps were being narrowed or not ([Schildkamp, 2019](#)).

Consistent with global trends, African countries are also committed to the academic success of their students, and among the many roles assigned to the school management is students'

welfare. In South Africa, for example, the South African School Act (SASA) No.84 of 1996 created School Governing Bodies (SGBs) which are mandated to adopt a code of conduct for the learners, among other roles. In Tanzania, Sulley (2016) found that BOMs were in charge of students' discipline while Juma (2011) who did a study in the same country in Dar es Salaam region, found that in best performing schools, rules and regulations were suitable in managing school discipline. In Rwanda, Nuwayo (2021) established that in schools where students had welfare facilitations, they performed well in academics compared to those who were not properly facilitated.

Likewise, in Kenya BOMs have been given their mandate to manage schools by the Basic Education Act (Republic of Kenya, 2013). The Act mandates BOMs with the duty of promoting quality education for all students. To achieve that, there are innumerable functions assigned to the boards but this research was interested in the area of students' welfare management practices. Students' welfare tasks assigned to the BOMs include dealing with students' discipline cases and making reports available to County Education Boards (CEB); Provision of all learners with guidance and counselling and looking into their welfare; and observing human rights and ensuring their safety. BOMs should also advocate for the spirit of cohesion, peace, integration, tolerance, inclusion, and elimination of hate speech and tribalism at the school level (Republic of Kenya, 2013).

In spite of the foregoing, The National Education Sector Strategic Plan for the Period 2018 – 2022 lamented concerning governance, management and accountability inadequacies in secondary schools. On students' welfare, they observed abuse and exploitation of learners, poor quality of education provided and lack of standards for physical safety in and around the schools, among others (Republic of Kenya, 2018). Studies that have also been done on tasks assigned to the BOMs on students' welfare have found out that poor student achievement has a direct or indirect link to inadequate or improper use of data on the part of Boards of Management as they waste time and resources implementing curriculum areas and policies that mismatch their students' needs (Dawo and Simatwa, 2010).

Nevertheless, Ogolla's (2017) study established that as far as students' discipline cases was concerned, the BOMs ensured that there were school rules and regulations which were issued to the students and parents and they signed them during admission. However King'oina's (2017) study, which was qualitative in nature and whose respondents were teachers and head teachers, differed as it found that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that BOMs did not participate in the management of students' discipline in schools.

Kindiki (2009) found that board members provided guidance and counselling to students in areas of career development and students' spirituality which are associated with students' welfare.

Okoro and Amadioha (2016) also established that deviant and misfit behaviors brought about by use of illegal substances such as drugs were dealt with by use of religious knowledge. Co-curricular activities were also used to reduce ill behavior and to encourage good morals.

Many of the studies reviewed in Kenya attempted to approach BOMs students' welfare tasks from the angle of discipline and students' academic performance and little research had been done on all the students' welfare tasks assigned to the BOMs. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to assess the status of BOMs students' welfare practices as charged by the Basic Education Act, 2013 and to establish the relationship the practices had on students' performance at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE).

As is the case with other countries, academic performance at secondary school level in Kenya has a significant value attached to it as a major determinant of the well-being of youths and the nation in general (Republic of Kenya, 2017). In Kenya, KCSE results are used to provide evidence that certifies the achievement of students, and also to assign them to further education courses at the university level (Jagero, 2013). Besides, KCSE exam facilitates international mobility and is needed in the job market for placement. With high levels of income, citizens save more and subsequently this leads to increased levels of investment. This has been the case for such industrialised nations like Japan and South Korea (Republic of Kenya, 2017). Therefore, the importance of KCSE results cannot be under-estimated. Accordingly, in this study students' academic performance was inferred by the standardised score based on KCSE school performance.

Statistical data gathered on analysed KCSE results, even as recent as the year 2020, show a consistently low performance at KCSE by the students in Kitui and Makueni counties (Muema, 2021; Mutinda, 2022). Indiscipline cases have also been reported in the two counties. As early as 2016, deterioration of discipline among students in classrooms and around the schools was observed in these counties (Koki, 2015; Maingi, Maithya, Mulwa and Migosi, 2017). Accordingly, it was important to investigate the extent to which the Boards of Management had executed their student welfare practices and their influence on students' KCSE performance in the two counties in Kenya.

## **Methodology**

The research adopted a correlational design to describe and calculate the degree of relationship between BOMs welfare practices and students' performance at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in public schools in Kitui and Makueni counties. The target population consisted of 10,010 board members and principals (4,563 board members and 351 principals from Kitui County; and 4,732 board members and 364 principals from Makueni

County) drawn from 351 public secondary schools in Kitui County; and 364 in Makueni County. The used schools had presented candidates for KCSE examinations in the previous three years i.e. 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Purposive sampling was used to sample the board members and the principals. Krejcie and Morgan's sample size formula was used to calculate the sample size of BOM members due to their large numbers. The total number obtained from the formula was divided by 13 board members to get the number of schools to participate in the study. Systematic sampling technique was used to get the individual schools that were to participate in the study. In total, the number of sampled schools and principals were 54 (27 from each of the counties), board members were 709 (354 from Kitui County and 355 from Makueni County), bringing the total sample size to 763.

The study utilised two sets of data collection instruments i.e. questionnaires for the board members and an interview schedule for the principals. The questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data whereas the interview schedule was used to collect qualitative data.

Processing and organisation of data was done by use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. Means and standard deviation were used to explore the extent to which the identified practices had been adopted in the sampled schools while simple linear regression was used to establish the relationship between boards' practices and students' academic performance. The principals' interviews were analysed and presented in narratives and in verbatim. The results were triangulated for clarity purposes.

## **Results**

The two counties achieved a mean of less than six (6) points out of a possible maximum of 12 points at KCSE (Republic of Kenya, 2020). The performance in both counties was below average, yet the minimum mean grade for entry to University is a C+ (plus) according to the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (2019). This means that majority of the students who learnt in Kitui and Makueni counties did not meet the minimum entry requirement for university education (which is considered to be very important in the 21st Century).

A large number of the board members (86.8%) affirmed that they had been provided with students' school progress reports. This implies that they were keen on students' academic performance. This concurs with Ong'enge's (2016) study where board members demonstrated that majority of them agreed that they conducted regular meetings with their principals to discuss school governance issues which influence academic performance of the students. The findings are positive as literature had showed that excellence in academic performance in most countries

is more often associated with quality life and opportunity for career development of an individual (Mpiluka, 2014).

Majority of the board members also agreed and strongly agreed (87.4%) that they used the data they received or feedback provided to give guidance for new policy and direction concerning students' welfare. These results imply that the BOMs had embraced use of data in their decision making unlike the earlier studies, like that of Dawo and Simatwa (2010), which indicated that in Kenya school boards were not conversant with data usage. Instead, "they left it to the principal to interpret" which led to poor student's academic achievement. To them, board members wasted time and resources implementing curriculum areas and policies that mismatch their students' needs. It is noteworthy that Dawo and Simatwa's study (2010) was done before the formulation and implementation of the new policy guiding education (The Basic Education Act, 2013). Since then, a lot has happened technologically on formation and operations of BOMs.

Therefore, the boards need to improve on data collection, analysis, reporting and communication of students' performance. This is the only way that boards can know whether students' achievement gaps have been narrowed or not ([Schildkamp](#), 2019). In the two counties, a majority of the boards members (78%) were involved in the formulation and implementation of school rules which maintained discipline and order. These finding are similar to those of Ogolla (2017) which indicated that BOMs ensured that there were school rules and regulations which were issued to the students and parents on admission to the schools. This means that the rules and regulations were brought to board meetings to be discussed and approved.

Majority of the board members (70%) either agreed that they ensured that discipline was dealt with in line with the laid down procedures. The trend needs to be commended as a study done in Tanzania by Juma (2011) found that in best performing schools, rules and regulations were suitable in managing school discipline and ensured safety. Further, this study found that all the board members (100%) agreed that they ensured, through the principal, that both the students and their parents signed the rules and regulations during admission (to show that they agreed to the rules and the consequence thereof). Majority of the board members (82.9%) also indicated that the school rules were in line with the Children's Act and The Basic Education Act, 2013.

A very big percentage of the board members (95.4%) confirmed that the students' were involved in peace and team spirit activities such as music. This is laudable since it ensured that all the students were guaranteed of their safety and that there was no bullying in the schools. Many of the BOM members (78.2%) also agreed that they co-curricular activities such as clubs and societies were offered in the schools to develop social morality and spiritualism. These findings agree with those of Okoro and Amadioha (2016) who recommended use of extra-curricular activities to develop social morality. Also, Dze-Ngwa, et al. (2009) advocated for the

introduction of peace education in schools to train peace-builders who would then serve as nurseries for peace-building processes. In Kenya, the school boards should ensure that peace clubs dubbed “Amani Clubs” under The **National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC)** are established to promote appreciation of diversity, peaceful, co-existence and dispute resolution among the students (NCIC, 2024).

In line with their mandate, majority the board members (80.7%) indicated that for they ensured that human rights are observed in the schools for the sake of peaceful co-existence and safety of the learners. Further, majority of the board member (90.4%) agreed that they ensured that all learners were provided with guidance and counselling. This means that the board members availed guidance and counselling teachers and the needed and resources. This finding contradicts Kong’oina’s (2017) study, whose respondents were teachers and head teachers, which indicated that BOM members did not foster guidance and counselling programmes in schools. The difference could be attributed to the fact that the respondents for this current study were board members themselves. It is, however, worthy noting that the board members were rarely involved in direct counselling to the concerned students as their duty was to make policies.

Lastly, all the board members (100%) indicated that they got reports on students’ discipline in their meetings. This strongly contrasts the findings of studies reviewed in this study. For instance, Kong’oina’s (2017) results found that most board members did not participate in matters relating to students’ discipline. This could be due to the fact that discipline issues were left to the school administration, parents and the teachers to deal with. The only cases that could reach the BOMs’ attention were those that had escalated to suspension or expulsion before being referred to the Ministry of Education for concurrence or otherwise. In conclusion, it is clear that majority of the boards scored highly in the various welfare practices with a mean of 4.09. This means that the boards’ practices in student welfare adequately supported teaching and learning which would lead to enhanced students’ academic performance.

The principals had been interviewed on whether the board members were competent in students’ welfare management practices and they indicated that most boards frequently held meetings to discuss students’ performance and reviewed the reports that were aimed at improving student performance. One principal from a county school said:

Boards are involved in ratifying the guidelines and policies teachers put in place concerning students’ welfare.

Another principal from a sub-county school had contrary sentiments as follows:

The boards over-rely on what they gather from students without bothering to establish the truth or otherwise. Some interacted casually with students. I fear being rejected and

ejected from the school if I do not give in to their demands, even when at times they are flouting government policies.

From the foregoing sentiments, it can be deduced that some school board members depended on gossip to make decisions rather than collecting data using valid methods. Nevertheless, not all the principals had negative comments about the board members' performance on student welfare as one of them from a county school had this to say:

Yes, board members are very particular on the welfare of students with an intention to create a child friendly school. They frequently discuss issues that ensure a peaceful environment prevails in the school for students to undertake their learning without disturbances.

A challenge, however, was noted of some board members interfering with the running of the schools in terms of discipline of the students. One extra county school principal cited an incident in which one board member wanted the Deputy Principal to re-admit a student who was a relative of the said board member without reference to school rules. The principal revealed that:

This particular board member went to my Deputy Principal's office and requested for the student to be re admitted back to the school unconditionally. Because the student had been brought to the Deputy's office by the class teacher, and the Deputy called the class teacher and it was agreed that the student could not be re-admitted without fulfilling the agreed requirement, as he had gone against the classroom rules set by the class teacher and other students. The case was brought by the board member to my office and, of course, I had to support my Deputy and my teacher as matters discipline are paramount in any school which is concerned about students' performance. Since that time, the said board member stopped attending board meetings.

With respect to student welfare management practices, the principals noted that involvement of parents was a key aspect that BOMs had achieved greatly. The principals indicated that BOMs had set strategies that ensured that parents were involved in their children's affairs in school.

This study also sought to test the hypothesis:  $H_0$ : there is no significant relationship between BOMs students' welfare management practices and students' performance at KCSE in Kitui County and Makueni County. Simple linear regression analysis was run and a model summary was generated and presented is presented in Table 1:

The R value showed positive degree of linear relationship between the boards' student welfare management practices and students' performance as indicated by  $r=0.554$ . Table 1 indicates the adjusted R2 as .250, which implies that boards' participation in students' welfare practices



accounted for 25% of the variance in students’ KCSE performance. Thus, 25% of the total variability in students’ performance can be explained by boards’ student welfare management practices while 75% of the variation in students’ performance cannot be explained by the boards’ student welfare management practices.

**Table 1: Model Summary for Boards’ Student Welfare Management Practices**

	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.554 <sup>a</sup>	.286	.250	.830

a. Predictors: (Constant), Boards’ Students’ Welfare Management Practices

To test the goodness of fit of the regression model, *F* value was obtained. The ANOVA model summary is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Goodness of Fit for Boards’ Student Welfare Management Practices**

County			Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Kitui	1	Regression	5.135	1	5.135	5.737	.000
		Residual	260.445	618	.895		
		Total	265.580	619			
a. Dependent Variable: Performance							
b. Predictors: (Constant), Practices of School Boards on Students Welfare Resources.							

Table 2 indicates that the model was fit and therefore acceptable for the regression equation. This is indicated by *F* Statistics which has value  $F(1, 618) = 5.737, p < .0001$ .

To test if there was a significant relationship between the BOMs’ student welfare management practices and students’ performance, a linear regressions analysis was carried as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Linear Regressions on Boards’ Student Welfare Management Practices and Student Performance**

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.15	.029		6.319	.000
	Practices of School Boards on Students Welfare Resource	.260	.182	.262	2.276	.018

a. Dependent Variable: Students’ Performance

The regression results in Table 3 show that there is significant relationship between the BOMs’ student welfare management practices and students’ performance. This is indicated by p value=.018<0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis that: “There is no significant relationship between the BOMs’ student welfare management practices and students’ performance was rejected.

The intercept of the regression line was:  $Y = 1.15 + .26X$ .

This confirms that when BOMs’ student welfare management practices increased by 1 unit, student performance increased by 1.41. The standardized beta value of 0.262 indicates that increase in BOMs’ student welfare management practices by 1% would lead to increase in student performance by 26.7%. Therefore, any effort undertaken to address students’ welfare management practices is expected to lead to improvement in students’ performance.

**Discussion**

The status of students' welfare was evaluated under twelve main variables and scores attained as follows: receiving student reports on areas requiring improvement (4.8), use of data for decision making (4.1), involvement in formulation and implementation of school rules (4.07), collection, analysis, and reporting of students' improvement (4.02), ensuring discipline is dealt with in line with the laid down procedures (3.12), ensuring that school rules and regulations are in line with the Children's Act, 2021 (4.0), making reports to County Education Board (CEB) on students' discipline cases (3.77), elimination of hate speech, peace, integration, tolerance, inclusion and tribalism (4.19), use of clubs and societies to develop social morality and spiritualism (4.22), use of guidance and counselling to deal with indiscipline(4.25), human rights are observed using school rule (4.2), and BOM members involvement in students' discipline report (4.34). These results show that BOMs were involved in student welfare practices to a large extent since in all of them a mean above 3 was attained, with the overall mean for all the items being 4.09. Qualitative analysis from the principals interviewed had similar results although some indicated that some board members were not conversant with use of data to make decisions.

A Pearson correlation coefficient  $r=0.554$ ,  $p$ -value  $<0.01$  at 0.01 level of significance showed that practices of school boards on students' welfare influenced students' performance. Besides, an R value of 0.554 indicated a relatively strong degree of correlation. The R Square value .250 demonstrates that 25% of students' performance was as a result of BOMs' student welfare management practices. This means that BOMs' student welfare practices had influence on students' performance. A probability ( $p$ ) value of 0.018 that was below 0.05 indicates that the model applied could statistically significantly predict the outcome variable. Thus, the null hypothesis that stated that "There is no significant relationship between BOMs' student welfare management practices and students' performance at KCSE in Kitui and Makueni counties" was rejected.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that the boards of management students' welfare practices in Kitui and Makueni counties were at a satisfactory level. It is further concluded that the students in both Kitui and Makueni counties did not perform well at KCSE examinations since the average performance was below 6 points out of a possible maximum of 12 points. Lastly, the study concludes that the boards of management student welfare practices greatly influence students' academic performance as justified by the strong correlation between the variables.

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