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BOARD OF MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY AND UTILIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN PUBLIC JUNIOR SCHOOLS IN THARAKA NITHI COUNTY, KENYA

Njeru Kathambi Doris^{1*}, Luke Murithi Kathenya¹, Joseph M Kirugua¹

¹Department of Education, School of Education and Social Sciences, Tharaka University, Kenya.

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

Boards of Management (BoMs) are the principal governance organs overseeing educational resources in Kenyan public Junior schools, yet the contribution of members' professional competency to their mandate remains empirically contested. The study evaluated the influence of BoM professional competency on the utilization of educational resources in public Junior schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted, anchored on Governance Theory and Systems Theory. Data were collected from 85 Heads of Institution, drawn through stratified and simple random sampling from a target population of 367 public Junior schools, using a structured, pilot-tested questionnaire whose reliability and content validity were established prior to administration. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression were computed using SPSS version 30, with hypotheses tested at the 0.05 level. Respondents affirmed several competency dimensions, including knowledge levels (92.9% combined agreement), digital record-keeping (89.4%) and independent audits (85.9%); however, medium-term resource planning was the weakest indicator, with only 54.1% endorsement. Professional competency was not significantly correlated with resource utilization ($r = 0.196$, $p = 0.072$) and was not a significant predictor in the regression model ($\beta = 0.096$, $p = 0.372$), although the overall model explained 20.2% of variance in utilization ($R^2 = 0.202$, $F(4, 80) = 5.069$, $p = 0.001$). The null hypothesis was retained at both bivariate and multivariate levels. The researcher suggested that measured competency attributes were decoupled from the operational practices, such as strategic planning, functional sub-committees and policy execution, which most directly drove resource utilization in such setting. The study concluded that policy guidance is central in school management. The study recommended that BoM capacity-building should shift from credential-based selection

toward functional, practice-based competencies, supported by institutionalized medium-term planning and clearer performance-evaluation frameworks at county level. Study may help reshape the way educational institutions are run.

Key Words: Board of Management; professional competency; educational resource utilization; school governance; public Junior schools

Background Information

Internationally, evidence on the link between board or school-management competency and resource or performance outcomes remains mixed. Drawing on 191 primary studies published between 2000 and 2020, Aldridge and McLure (2024) found that the readiness, planning capacity and internal capacity-building of school leaders were decisive in determining whether mandated reforms translated into practice, yet their review stopped short of testing this relationship against a quantifiable measure of resource utilization, leaving the mechanism by which leadership capacity converts into resource outcomes only partially specified. In a parallel vein, a systematic review and meta-analysis of twenty evaluations across low- and middle-income countries by Anand *et al.* (2023) reported that interventions aimed at strengthening school leaders' management skills produced only a modest improvement in learning outcomes of 0.033 standard deviations, attributing the limited effect to low uptake, weak incentive structures and a long causal chain between leadership training and classroom-level outcomes. These findings imply that competency-building investments do not automatically translate into proportionate gains in resource use or learning outcomes, a pattern that motivates closer empirical scrutiny in specific governance contexts such as Kenya's newly constituted Junior schools.

Within Sub-Saharan Africa, governance committees analogous to BoMs have been examined chiefly for their participatory and accountability functions rather than for the direct contribution of member competency to resource outcomes. In Nigeria, Anyakorah *et al.* (2022) surveyed 357 teachers in Abuja and found that School-Based Management Committees played a largely uneven role in the funding and planning of Junior secondary schools, with substantial gaps between committee mandate and demonstrated capacity. This pattern of nominal authority without commensurate operational competency recurs across the regional literature and raises the question of whether similar decoupling characterizes Kenyan BoMs.

In Kenya specifically, several county-level studies have examined BoM functioning, but almost all have used student academic performance, teacher performance or general school development, rather than resource utilization, as the dependent variable, and few have isolated professional competency as a discrete predictor. Chesseret *et al.* (2024), working with 358 teachers and 12 principals in the North Rift counties, established that BoM effectiveness in setting strategic direction significantly predicted students' academic performance ($\beta = 0.325$, $p < 0.001$), while Martin *et al.* (2022) found a significant positive relationship between BoM resource management strategy and school development in West Pokot County ($r = 0.394$, $p = 0.001$). Mbii *et al.* (2020) further reported that Boards' financial

resource practices were associated with student performance in two Kenyan counties, and Mogere and Momanyi (2024) documented that BoM practices in Nyamira County significantly influenced teachers' performance. None of these studies, however, modelled educational resource utilization directly as the outcome variable, nor did they disaggregate professional competency as a standalone predictor net of resource allocation, policy implementation and financial control. This represents a conceptual gap that the present study addresses.

Tharaka Nithi County presents a particularly instructive setting for this inquiry. As a predominantly rural and agrarian county (Commission on Revenue Allocation, 2023), it has experienced the documented national strain of rolling out the Competency-Based Curriculum amid infrastructural and staffing shortfalls, conditions under which the practical, rather than credential-based, competency of BoM members might be expected to matter most. Despite the Basic Education Act's clear assignment of oversight responsibility to BoMs, the persistence of resource shortages, uneven infrastructure and inconsistent policy enforcement in the county's Junior schools suggests that the governance capacity of Boards, including their professional competency, may not be functioning as theorized. It is against this backdrop that the present study sought to evaluate the influence of BoM professional competency on the utilization of educational resources in public Junior schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya, thereby providing empirical evidence to either substantiate or qualify the assumption, embedded in much of the governance literature, that more competent boards necessarily produce more effective resource utilization.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the establishment of Boards of Management (BoMs) under the Basic Education Act (2013) to oversee the management and utilization of educational resources in public schools, many public Junior schools in Kenya continue to experience inefficient utilization of teaching and learning resources, inadequate infrastructure, weak strategic planning and inconsistencies in policy implementation. These challenges have become more pronounced following the rollout of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), which has increased demands for effective governance and prudent resource management. Although professional competency of BoM members is widely assumed to enhance school governance, existing empirical studies in Kenya have primarily examined its relationship with academic achievement, school development or teacher performance rather than educational resource utilization. Moreover, previous studies have largely treated BoM effectiveness as a composite construct without isolating professional competency from other governance functions such as resource allocation, financial control and policy implementation. Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence on whether professional competency independently influences the utilization of educational resources in public Junior schools. This knowledge gap is particularly evident in Tharaka Nithi County, where public Junior schools continue to experience resource constraints despite the existence of legally constituted Boards of Management. Therefore, this study sought to determine whether BoM professional competency significantly influences the utilization of educational resources in public Junior schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya.

Objective

To examine influence of professional competency on utilization of educational resources in public Junior schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya

Hypothesis

The study was guided by the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant influence of BoM professional competency on utilization of educational resources in public Junior schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Tharaka Nithi County, located in the former Eastern Province of Kenya and bordering Embu, Meru and Kitui counties. The county is predominantly rural and agrarian (Commission on Revenue Allocation, 2023) and hosts 367 public Junior schools that fall under the governance jurisdiction of legally constituted BoMs as provided for under the Basic Education Act (Republic of Kenya, 2013).

The study adopted a descriptive and cross-sectional research designs, which permitted systematic quantification of Heads of Institutions' perceptions regarding Board of Management (BoM) professional competency and its association with the utilization of educational resources, without manipulation of the variables under investigation. The design was deemed appropriate because it allowed simultaneous description of the prevailing state of BoM professional competency and statistical testing of its relationship with resource utilization within a naturally occurring governance context.

The target population for this component of the broader study comprised the 367 Heads of Institutions (HoIs) of public Junior schools in Tharaka Nithi County, each of whom serves as the institutional administrator most proximate to day-to-day Board-school interaction on resource matters. The required sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for finite populations, yielding a target sample of 93 HoIs. A stratified sampling procedure was used to ensure proportional representation across the county's seven sub-counties (Chiakariga, Igamba Ng'ombe, Maara, Meru South, Muthambi, Tharaka North and Tharaka South), with simple random sampling subsequently applied within each stratum to select individual respondents. Of the 93 questionnaires administered to HoIs, 85 were fully completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 91.4%, which exceeds the conventional threshold for an acceptable survey response rate in social science research.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to Heads of Institutions. The instrument was organized into thematic sections aligned to the study's objectives, with the section relevant to this paper (BoM professional competency) comprising ten closed-ended, five-point Likert-scale items (ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) addressing members' knowledge levels, coordination with parents and sponsors, digital record-keeping practices, community partnership mobilization, clarity of government policy guidance, performance-based evaluation, functional sub-committee structures, stakeholder engagement forums, medium-term

(three-year) resource planning and the use of independent audits. A parallel section captured perceptions of educational resource utilization, the dependent variable, operationalized through indicators of effectiveness, efficiency, infrastructure utilization and human resource deployment.

Prior to full administration, the instrument was piloted among Heads of Institutions in neighbouring Meru County, selected for its comparable educational structures, governance systems and socio-economic profile. The pilot sample comprised 29 respondents, equivalent to approximately 10% of the projected overall sample, consistent with established guidance for pilot-study sizing (Kothari, 2004). Content validity was established through expert review by specialists in educational management and school governance, who assessed each item for clarity, relevance and comprehensiveness, while construct validity was further examined through factor analysis to confirm that items loaded appropriately onto their intended theoretical constructs. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 adopted as the minimum acceptable coefficient; items falling below this threshold were revised for wording, response options or structural placement before the main data collection exercise.

Results and Discussions

Of the 93 questionnaires administered to Heads of Institutions, 85 were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 91.4%. The demographic profile of the 85 respondents revealed a male-dominated leadership cohort, with 52 respondents (61.2%) male and 33 (38.8%) female. The mean age of respondents was 49.68 years (SD = 6.13), indicating a leadership pool clustered in late mid-career. In terms of academic qualification, 45 respondents (52.9%) held a Bachelor's degree, 25 (29.4%) held a Diploma, 5 (5.9%) held a Master's degree and 10 (11.8%) reported other qualifications. The mean tenure as Head of Institution was 8.59 years (SD = 5.35), suggesting a moderately experienced cohort with substantial variability in institutional memory. Geographically, 73 respondents (85.9%) administered schools located in rural areas, against 12 (14.1%) in semi-urban settings, while sponsorship was dominated by Catholic-sponsored institutions (47.1%) and Anglican-sponsored institutions (23.5%), with the remainder distributed across other faith-based and secular sponsors.

Distribution of Heads of Institutions' Perceptions on BoM Professional Competency Indicators

Indicator	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Combined Affirmative (%)	Non-affirmative (%)
Knowledge levels of members enhance governance	43.5	49.4	92.9	7.1
Coordination with parents and sponsors	44.7	31.8	76.5	23.5
Digital record-keeping improves transparency	55.3	34.1	89.4	10.6
Community partnerships mobilize resources	47.1	37.6	84.7	15.3
Clear government policy	35.3	41.2	76.5	23.5

guidance enhances authority				
Performance-based evaluation promotes accountability	48.2	29.4	77.6	22.4
Functional sub-committees improve decisions	54.1	24.7	78.8	21.2
Stakeholder engagement forums support alignment	55.3	24.7	80.0	20.0
Medium-term (three-year) resource plans	34.1	20.0	54.1	45.9
Independent audits enhance public trust	30.6	55.3	85.9	14.1

Note. *Values are percentages of valid responses (N = 85); combined affirmative = Agree + Strongly Agree; combined non-affirmative = Strongly Disagree + Disagree + Neutral.*

The highest level of endorsement was recorded for members' knowledge levels enhancing governance of educational resources, with 79 of 85 respondents (92.9%) in combined agreement, followed by independent audits enhancing public trust (85.9%) and digital record-keeping improving transparency (89.4%). By contrast, the development of medium-term, three-year resource plans to promote sustainable resource use received the weakest endorsement of all professional competency indicators, with only 46 respondents (54.1%) in combined agreement and a markedly high neutral response of 32.9%, suggesting that such planning is either largely absent or unfamiliar to a substantial share of Heads of Institutions. Coordination between BoMs, parents and sponsors, and clarity of government policy guidance, each registered combined affirmative responses of 76.5%, with roughly one in four respondents expressing disagreement or neutrality, indicating moderate but incomplete consensus on these dimensions of competency.

Correlation of BoM Professional Competency and Resource Utilization

Pearson product-moment correlation was computed to examine the bivariate association between BoM professional competency and utilization of educational resources. The analysis yielded a weak, statistically non-significant positive correlation ($r = 0.196$, $p = 0.072$), marginally exceeding the conventional 0.05 threshold for significance. This result was consistent with a parallel non-parametric analysis, which similarly returned a non-significant association ($p = 0.257$). Professional competency did, however, correlate significantly with BoM financial control ($r = 0.358$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that the internal coherence among governance functions persisted even where the link to the ultimate outcome of resource utilization did not.

Regression of BoM Professional Competency and Resource Utilization

To determine the independent contribution of professional competency to resource utilization, net of resource allocation, policy implementation and financial control, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with all four BoM variables entered simultaneously as predictors. The model was statistically significant overall, $R = 0.450$, $R^2 = 0.202$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.162$, $F(4, 80) = 5.069$, $p = 0.001$, indicating that the four predictors jointly accounted for 20.2% of the variance in resource

utilization. Table 2 presents the unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients for each predictor.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Coefficients for BoM Variables Predicting Utilization of Educational Resources

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	1.146	0.705	—	1.626	0.108
BoM Resources Allocation	-0.013	0.184	-0.011	-0.073	0.942
BoM Policy Implementation	0.398	0.170	0.355	2.338	0.022*
BoM Financial Control	0.139	0.182	0.102	0.766	0.446
BoM Professional Competency	0.113	0.126	0.096	0.897	0.372

Note. *Dependent variable: Utilization of Educational Resources.* * $p < 0.05$. Model: $R = 0.450$, $R^2 = 0.202$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.162$, $F(4, 80) = 5.069$, $p = 0.001$.

As shown in Table 2, BoM policy implementation was the only statistically significant predictor of resource utilization in the multivariate model ($\beta = 0.355$, $p = 0.022$). BoM professional competency, the focal predictor for this study, was not statistically significant ($B = 0.113$, $SE = 0.126$, $\beta = 0.096$, $t = 0.897$, $p = 0.372$), indicating that once resource allocation, policy implementation and financial control were accounted for, professional competency did not exert an independent, measurable effect on how educational resources were utilized. BoM resources allocation ($\beta = -0.011$, $p = 0.942$) and BoM financial control ($\beta = 0.102$, $p = 0.446$) were similarly non-significant in this multivariate context, despite each having shown significant bivariate correlations with resource utilization, a pattern attributable to the strong intercorrelations among the four predictors (ranging from $r = 0.536$ to $r = 0.706$ among allocation, policy implementation and financial control).

The null hypothesis under examination, H_0 : BoM professional competency has no statistically significant influence on utilization of educational resources in public Junior schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya, was tested at both the bivariate and multivariate levels. At the bivariate level, the Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.196$, $p = 0.072$) did not reach statistical significance. At the multivariate level, the standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.096$, $p = 0.372$) likewise did not reach statistical significance. On the basis of this convergent evidence across both analytical approaches, the null hypothesis was retained: BoM professional competency, as measured in this study, did not exert a statistically significant influence on the utilization of educational resources in public Junior schools in Tharaka Nithi County.

The finding that BoM professional competency exerted no statistically significant influence on the utilization of educational resources, despite respondents broadly affirming several individual competency indicators, represents the most counterintuitive result of this study and warrants close interpretation against the global, regional and Kenyan literature.

Globally, the disjuncture between measured leadership or board competency and tangible resource or learning outcomes echoes findings beyond Kenya. Anand *et al.* (2023), synthesizing 39 effect estimates from 20 evaluations of school-management interventions across low- and middle-income countries, reported only a modest average improvement in learning outcomes of 0.033 standard

deviations, attributing this attenuation to low programme uptake, weak incentive structures and an extended causal chain linking leadership skill to classroom-level results. The present study's findings extend this pattern to resource utilization specifically: BoM members in Tharaka Nithi County affirmed possessing relevant knowledge (92.9% combined agreement) and valuing digital record-keeping (89.4%) and independent audits (85.9%), yet these self-reported strengths did not translate into a measurable effect on how resources were actually deployed. This is consistent with Aldridge and McLure's (2024) systematic review, which found that mandated educational reform succeeds only when leadership readiness is matched by comprehensive planning and systems-level capacity-building; in the present sample, the corresponding planning indicator, namely the development of medium-term, three-year resource plans, was by far the weakest-rated dimension of competency (54.1% combined agreement), suggesting that the specific competency most theoretically linked to translating knowledge into resource outcomes was precisely the one most lacking.

At the regional level, the decoupling of nominal governance authority from demonstrated operational capacity observed in this study mirrors patterns documented elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, Anyakorah *et al.* (2022) found that School-Based Management Committees in Abuja's Junior secondary schools played an inconsistent role in funding and planning despite their formal mandate, a finding broadly congruent with the present result that BoMs in Tharaka Nithi County possess functional sub-committees and stakeholder forums in name (78.8% and 80.0% combined agreement, respectively) without these structures translating into a measurable influence on resource utilization. This pattern lends support to the view, consistent with Governance Theory (Kooiman, 2010, 2016), that governance effectiveness depends less on the presence of structures or credentials and more on the quality of interaction, accountability and adaptive capacity among governance actors; where this interactive quality is weak, as appears to be the case for medium-term planning and performance evaluation in the present sample, the formal apparatus of competency fails to generate its expected effect.

Within Kenya, the present finding diverges from several county-level studies that have reported significant associations between BoM-related governance variables and school outcomes, though a closer reading suggests this divergence is more apparent than real. Chesseret *et al.* (2024) found that BoM effectiveness in setting strategic direction significantly predicted students' academic performance in the North Rift counties ($\beta = 0.325$, $p < 0.001$), while Martin *et al.* (2022) reported a significant positive relationship between BoM resource management strategy and school development in West Pokot County ($r = 0.394$, $p = 0.001$), and Mogere and Momanyi (2024) documented a significant influence of BoM practices on teachers' performance in Nyamira County. Crucially, however, each of these studies modelled outcomes such as academic performance, school development or teacher performance rather than resource utilization itself, and none disaggregated professional competency from the composite construct of BoM effectiveness or strategic direction. The present study's multivariate analysis showed that BoM policy implementation, not professional competency, was the dominant predictor of resource utilization ($\beta = 0.355$, $p = 0.022$), a result that is in fact compatible with these prior Kenyan studies if their reported effects of board strategic direction and resource management strategy are understood as operating substantially through policy execution and accountability mechanisms rather than through the discrete attribute of member competency.

Similarly, Mbii *et al.* (2020), examining BoM financial resource practices in two Kenyan counties, found these practices associated with student performance, yet the present study's finding that financial control lost statistical significance once policy implementation was accounted for ($\beta = 0.102$, $p = 0.446$) suggests that financial practices, like competency, may exert their influence indirectly through the policy-implementation channel rather than independently.

This study also addresses an empirical gap left open by the broader Kenyan literature on BoM functioning. Studies such as those by Chesseret *et al.* (2024), Martin *et al.* (2022), Mbii *et al.* (2020) and Mogere and Momanyi (2024) have collectively established that various dimensions of BoM governance matter for school-level outcomes, but none has isolated resource utilization as the dependent variable while simultaneously controlling for resource allocation, policy implementation and financial control as competing predictors. By doing so, the present study clarifies that, at least in the specific institutional and socio-economic context of Tharaka Nithi County's public Junior schools, professional competency operates as a necessary but evidently insufficient condition for effective resource utilization: BoM members may possess relevant knowledge and value transparency mechanisms, yet without functioning medium-term planning, clear performance evaluation and well-defined sub-committee mandates, this knowledge does not convert into demonstrable governance effect. This finding is consistent with the broader theoretical proposition, articulated through Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968; Mackatiani *et al.*, 2017), that organizational components such as governance competency operate interdependently within a wider system, such that disruption or underdevelopment in one component, here, strategic planning capacity, can suppress the contribution of an otherwise well-developed component, here, member knowledge, to overall system performance.

The practical implication of this pattern is that policy attention directed solely at strengthening the credentials or general knowledge base of BoM members, an approach implicit in much of the existing capacity-building literature reviewed by Aldridge and McLure (2024) and consistent with the meta-governance framing advanced by Hooge *et al.* (2022), is unlikely by itself to improve resource utilization in rural Kenyan Junior schools. Instead, the evidence from Tharaka Nithi County points toward the specific operational deficits, namely the near-absence of medium-term resource planning, ambiguous performance evaluation criteria and nominal rather than functional sub-committees, as the more proximate levers through which professional competency could be made to matter for resource outcomes.

Conclusions

This study set out to evaluate the influence of Board of Management professional competency on the utilization of educational resources in public Junior schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. The evidence, drawn from 85 Heads of Institutions and analyzed through both bivariate correlation and multiple regression, converged on the conclusion that professional competency, as currently constituted and measured, does not exert a statistically significant influence on resource utilization, either in isolation ($r = 0.196$, $p = 0.072$) or net of resource allocation, policy implementation and financial control ($\beta = 0.096$, $p = 0.372$). The corresponding null hypothesis was therefore retained. This null finding is not, however, evidence that competency is irrelevant to governance; rather, the descriptive results indicate that competency in this context is unevenly distributed across its

constituent dimensions, strong in members' general knowledge, digital record-keeping and openness to independent audit, but critically weak in medium-term strategic planning, performance evaluation and the functional operation of sub-committees. It is this internal unevenness, more than an absence of competency altogether, that appears to explain why professional competency fails to register as an independent driver of resource utilization once the more procedurally embedded function of policy implementation is taken into account. The study contributes new context-specific evidence to a literature that has, to date, more often modelled BoM influence on academic or developmental outcomes than on resource utilization directly, and it suggests that future capacity-building investment for Kenyan school Boards would be better directed toward institutionalizing strategic planning and accountability practices than toward credentialing alone.

Recommendations

From the study, the Ministry of education will need to revise the framework for appointing and training Board of Management members by emphasizing functional governance competencies, including strategic planning, policy implementation, accountability and performance management, rather than relying primarily on academic or professional qualifications. The Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and County Directors of Education will consider institutionalizing continuous professional development programmes for BoM members focusing on practical governance skills such as educational resource planning, monitoring and evaluation, financial oversight and evidence-based decision-making. Boards of Management should develop and implement comprehensive medium-term (three to five-year) educational resource plans aligned with school improvement priorities. Such plans should include clear resource mobilization strategies, measurable performance indicators and periodic reviews to ensure efficient utilization of available resources. Capacity-building programmes for Board members should shift from general orientation seminars to competency-based practical training.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies should examine the mechanisms through which professional competency is translated into resource utilization, using broader respondent groups and longitudinal or mixed-method designs to clarify the role of strategic planning, performance evaluation, sub-committee functioning and policy implementation.

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