

## Research Article

# Effects of Strategic Management Practices and Oversight Boards on Management of Public Secondary Schools in Busia County, Kenya

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## Abstract

Strategic management practices as an effective tool of strengthening performance in educational institutions has become a subject of interest. The quality of education in public secondary schools is below the international desirable standards. The purpose of this study was to establish the Strategic Management practices and oversight roles of boards of public secondary schools in Nambale Sub County. The study adopted the descriptive cross sectional survey research design. The target population for this study was the 20 registered public secondary schools in Nambale Sub County. Stratified sampling was adopted so as to give each item in the population an equal probability of being selected. The sample population of 8 schools was selected randomly from each stratum. The data was grouped into various categories and entered in the SPSS software to facilitate the analysis using descriptive statistics. Frequency distribution tables were used to summarize the data from respondents. The data was presented in frequency distributions tables and pie charts for ease of understanding and analysis. The study established that 32.5% of secondary schools had adopted strategic management practices in the past. The study further established that the schools which had developed strategic plans only 15% of these schools implemented plans fully. The study concluded that strategic management practices had a positive relationship with competitive advantage of the organizations and that all public secondary schools should embrace strategic management in order to achieve a competitive advantage.

**Keywords:** Strategic Management; Schools; Practices; Busia County.

## Introduction

The Government of the Republic of Kenya [1]on Guidelines for Drafting Performance Contracts, stated categorically that, state corporations must have strategic plans as part of the Government of Kenya performance contracting scheme aimed at improving efficiency in these state corporations. In this case, the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) was considered as a state corporation running the business of overseeing education services in Kenya. The guideline statements, that is, the mission and vision statements of MOEST are all in place. The statements are enough to facilitate the much needed improvement in performance at all levels of education. The ministry's core values and strategic objectives are relevance, quality, accessibility and affordability.

These themes run through MOEST and to all institutions of learning, and specifically

secondary schools. Despite all these articulate concepts and strategies in place many secondary schools and specifically those in Busia County have continued to post poor and below average results. In support of this observation, [2] also articulated the concern that academic performance has continuously been poor in the majority of public secondary schools in Kenya. This has resulted in many stakeholders questioning the strategic and oversight roles played by the Board of Management in the public secondary schools. The Cabinet Secretary on releasing KCSE results of the year 2015 grieved that Busia County took the lead in examination malpractices.

This is a wake-up call for all the managers of education in the County including specific school boards of management. Since 2003, the government through the Ministry of Education Science and Technology has been keen on performance contracting in order to deliver its goals and objectives. This has created the

necessity and need for the strategic management practices in secondary schools; strategy analysis, strategy formulation, strategy choice, strategy implementation and evaluation and control [3]. In the year 2005, the government, through the MOEST, issued a directive to all the public secondary schools directing each school to develop a school strategic plan lasting a period of five years. It is therefore a ministerial requirement that all secondary schools in Kenya formulate strategic plans with a time frame of 3-5 years and action plans for each year. It is not clear if boards of management of public secondary schools develop strategic plans and if they utilize these plans for running the schools.

It has become evident however, that some schools rarely develop strategic plans leading to poor school management hence lowering the academic performance. This has led to unprecedented differences in growth and performance among public secondary schools. This study was set to establish if all public secondary schools in Nambale Sub County develop strategic plans and whether or not they use the plans in their management. The study also sought to assess the extent to which board of management oversee the strategic management of human resources in the school. From the literature review, there was limited evidence of past research studies that addressed the effects of strategic management practices and oversight roles of boards of management particularly in Busia County where the study was conducted.

This research study aimed at finding out the effects of strategic management practices and oversight roles of school boards on the management of public secondary schools in Nambale Sub-County. The specific objectives of this research were to: Establish whether or not all public secondary schools in Nambale Sub County develop strategic plans for running the schools; determine the extent to which public secondary schools in Nambale Sub County use strategic plans; assess the extent to which boards of management oversee the strategic management of human resource in their schools.

The objective of this study was to establish the Strategic Management practices and oversight roles of boards of public secondary schools in Nambale Sub County. The study established that 32.5% of secondary schools had adopted strategic management practices in the past. The study further established that the

schools which had developed strategic plans only 15% of these schools implemented plans fully. The study concluded that strategic management practices had a positive relationship with competitive advantage of the organizations and that all public secondary schools should embrace strategic management in order to achieve a competitive advantage.

### **Research methodology**

In seeking to understand strategic and oversight roles of the board of management, this study used mixed research approach. This multi-method research according to Johnson, [4] is methodological triangulation. Mixed methods research combines both qualitative and quantitative methods [5]. It has evolved as a result of the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative methods. In [6] mixed methods is defined as research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in a single study or a program of inquiry.

Specifically, the research study used descriptive survey method to show the interrelationships in the variables. This method supports the collection and analysis of large sets of quantitative data collected from multiple subjects. Surveys are a comparatively inexpensive method of quick data collection that sample respondents under real world conditions as opposed to controlled laboratory environments [7]. Survey data can be collected at a single point in time (cross-sectional) or at multiple intervals of time (longitudinal) by interviews (face-to-face or telephone) or self-administered surveys [8].

Surveys, which are made up of scales which consist of 2 parts – stimuli and response, are developed to measure the respondents judgments (appreciation or understanding of an issue), feelings or expressions, opinions, attitudes, and perceptions [9]. The stimuli part consists of phrases or statements describing the phenomenon of interest whilst the response part corresponds to the actual measurement. Scale responses measure a specific dimension such as agreement and liking. Popular scale measurement methods include; paired comparison, rank order, direct magnitude estimation, and rating [10].

The qualitative surveys were used in exploring issues interactively although large samples could not be covered as a result of the difficulties associated in gaining access to Board members. It also enabled respondents to explain certain decision dynamics and relationships [11]. Specifically, content analysis was done to establish the existence of strategic plans in public secondary schools. This study was conducted in Nambale Sub-County of Busia County. Nambale Sub-County is one of the seven sub-counties of Busia County, other Sub-Counties being: Bunyala, Samia, Teso South, Teso North, Matayos and Butula. The study was conducted in Nambale sub-county because it had all categories of schools such as public national and extra county boarding schools, county and sub-county schools. This was not a common phenomenon in other sub counties in Busia County. All registered 20 public secondary schools in Nambale Sub - county, constituted the sample frame. Nambale Sub County, unlike other sub counties in Busia, has all the categories of schools as per the Ministry of Education's classification.

The sub county had a total of twenty two secondary schools but two were privately owned. Eight public secondary schools were selected from the target population to participate in the study. The sample size of 8 public schools was obtained using stratified method to ensure representativeness. A list of secondary schools in the Sub-County with fully inaugurated boards of management was obtained from the office of the Sub County Director of Education (SCDE) to facilitate the stratification process. This stratification was guided by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology classification of schools as based on; National category of schools, Extra - County schools, County schools and Sub-County schools. According to [8] researchers classify the units in the sampling frame into the strata on the basis of the characteristics that if properly represented in the sample it may bias the inferences the researcher makes. A simple random sampling was then applied after stratifying the schools to ensure equal chance of each school to be selected. A total of 8 schools were involved in the research. This number is higher than the minimum of 10% recommended by research authorities such as [3]. The Chairperson of the board, 3 committee chairpersons picked from welfare, academics

and finance committees, and principal of the school will be picked purposively for all the 8 schools to give a total of 40 participants which is 33.33% of 120 total board membership populations of the 8 schools. With the research permit and approval from University research department, the researcher will made personal visits to the respondents and explained the purpose of the research. This was to assure the respondents of the confidentiality of their responses. Questionnaires and semi structured interviews were developed and self-administered by the researcher and researcher aide. The researcher issued the questionnaires to the sampled board members who filled them at the time and place prior agreed upon preferably the days when board meetings were called. The respondents were expected to respond to the questions for a period not exceeding one hour.

The reason for the choice of a questionnaire as a tool for data collection was informed by the fact that respondents were able to complete questionnaires without the researcher's help with advantage of anonymity. A questionnaire is an instrument used to gather data, which allows measurement for or against a particular viewpoint [1]. It is composed of a list of questions that relate to the topic under study. This is then given to targeted people in the field who in turn give their responses. The desired information is then extracted from the questionnaires. Questionnaires have a big advantage in that so much information can be gathered and analyzed within a short time. It is also cheaper and quicker method that enables the coverage of larger samples [7]. As questionnaires were being administered to the respondents, the researcher also applied observation techniques to record information as it occurred in the respective schools.

Reliability of an instrument is the consistency in producing a reliable result. Reliability focuses on the degree to which empirical indicators are consistent across two or more attempts to measure the theoretical concept [6]. The researcher used the split-half method. The split half technique of assessing reliability requires only one testing session. The research instrument was split in two halves. The testing involved splitting the test into two halves and finding the extent of correspondence or reliability between the two halves. In computing split halves reliability the test items were divided

into two halves, each half scoring independently of the other with the items of the two halves matched on content and difficulty. Validity on the other hand is the degree to which a test measures what it purports to be measuring.

This is how well a test measures what it is intended to measure. Validity can also be said to be the degree to which results are obtained from and analysis of data actually represent phenomenon under investigation. In this case the researcher sought assistance from the experts who are Lecturers at Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University to ascertain the face and construct validity of the instruments used. The survey instrument was pretested by administering the questionnaire to a small sample of respondents, drawn from one school outside the Sub-County of interest. Their responses and general reactions were sought after and examined. Suggestions for refinement and clarification of questions and items in the instrument was made with regard to meaning and clarity of each statement, relevance and adequacy of items, and any problems or uncertainties the respondents may have in completing the questionnaire. The research supervisors and faculty members were able to provide critical assessment of the content validity of each item, as suggested by [10]. These expert suggestions during the questionnaire design and revision process guaranteed a close match between the pre-test and final versions of the instrument.

The data obtained from the respondents was cleaned, coded, and key-punched into a computer and analyzed. Data analysis included both qualitative and quantitative processes. Quantitative data was analyzed by descriptive statistics with interpretation given in frequencies, percentages and mean scores with the use of relevant Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) programme. As [2] asserts, the purpose of descriptive statistics is to enable the researcher to meaningfully describe a distribution of scores or measurements using a few indices or statistics. Preliminary cross-tabulations was conducted to establish frequency counts. Statements in the questionnaires, other than single response items were formatted on a five-point Likert-type scale. Data was first examined using normal descriptive statistics to identify any peculiarities in frequencies. The mean was used as the central tendency measure. For variables measured by open-ended questions

the number of observations, relative frequencies and the mode was computed and presented.

For data collected through content analysis, recognition of concepts, themes, events and topical markers was done. At the end of each interview, I examined the contents to see what had been learned so far and what still needed to be found out. Based on this ongoing analysis, the researcher tried modifying the main questions preparing follow-up questions to pursue emerging ideas [9]. Finally, at the end of the interview process, all the responses were examined together to pull out coherent and consistent descriptions, themes, and theories that spoke to the research questions.

## Results and discussions

Table 1 shows the background information of the participants, from which the researcher can make several deductions and analysis of the data. Forty Board of Management (BOM) members took part in the study, five members from each of the eight sampled secondary schools in Nambale Sub County in Busia County in Kenya. The data analysis revealed that majority of the BOM members were of male gender constituting 65% compared to 35% female regarding academic qualifications, majority of board members had ordinary level certificate with 65% the diploma and University graduates constituted 10% and 25% respectively as seen in the table. On board diversity in terms of occupation, the self-employed members were 50%, teachers 27.5%, civil servants 7.5% and businessmen 15%. The data analysis in terms of age distribution of BOM members showed that majority were in the age bracket of 41 years above taking 80% while 40 years and below comprised of only 20%.

Based on the demographic analysis, majority of the board members had the ordinary level certificate with 26 (65%). Board members with diploma certificates were 4(10%) and University graduates were 10 (25%) (Figure 1). Most of the university graduates in this case were the secretaries to the board who were also the school principals. Majority of the board members were ordinary level certificate without formal training in any profession. Only 10% with diploma certificate were likely to add value to the school management by virtue of their professional training in different fields. The minimum academic qualification for board of

management of public secondary schools ought to be reviewed in order to have members who can add value to the school management.

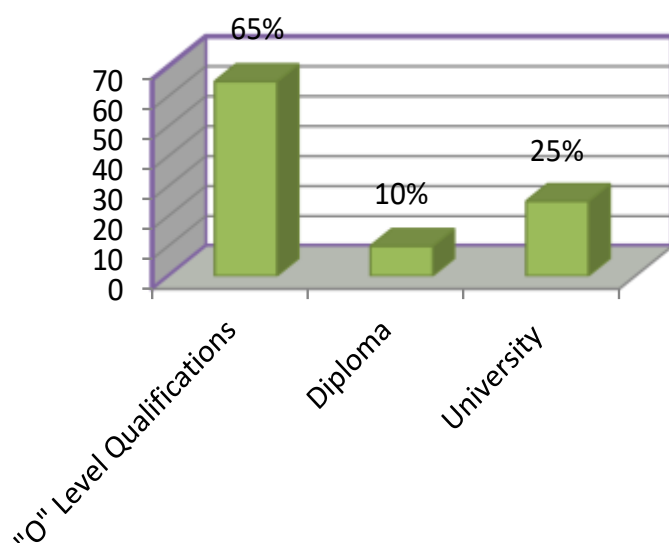


Figure 1. Academic Qualifications

A study by [5] investigated factors influencing Board of Management members' effectiveness in Human Resource Management in public secondary schools in Athi River District, Kenya. It was found from cross tabulation that BOM members' with university as their highest level of education performed better in human resource management in the secondary schools while board members with administrative experience and who had attended seminars and workshops were effective in managing human resource management practices in the secondary schools.

Board size in this study refers to the total number of board members on the board of any organization. Determining the model board size for organizations is very important because the number and quality of membership in an institution determines and influences the board functioning and hence corporate performance. The findings of this study revealed that most boards of public secondary schools were bloated with over 10 members on average as provided for by the basic education act, 2013. Most of the board members were farmers followed by teachers most of whom had retired from the teaching service. Much as majority of the farmers on the board had the basic qualifications of KCSE certificate, most of them lacked skills and experience in educational matters. As can be seen from figure 2, majority of the board members are aged 41 years and above with 80% compared to 40 years and below who form 20% of the board membership. The age distribution of

the board members is skewed and a proper balance is needs to be arrived at.

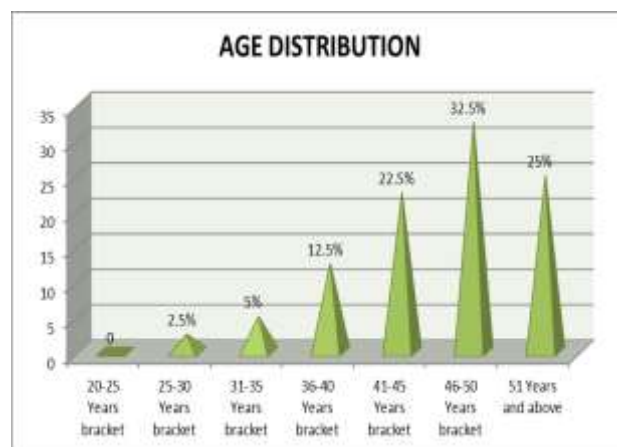


Figure 2. Age Distribution of Board Members

Majority of board members had served for more than 4 years and above at 75% compare with 25% with 3 years of service and below as in figure 3. Those with 4 years of service and above meant that they had served two terms since a single term comprises 3 years. A few other members had even served for more than 6 years meaning that they had gone beyond the stipulated maximum possible years of service. There was an aspect of entrenchment by some members of the board. The Ministry of education should come up with ways of discouraging members staying on the board for too long. Other capable members of the school community should be given chance to serve on the school board of management.

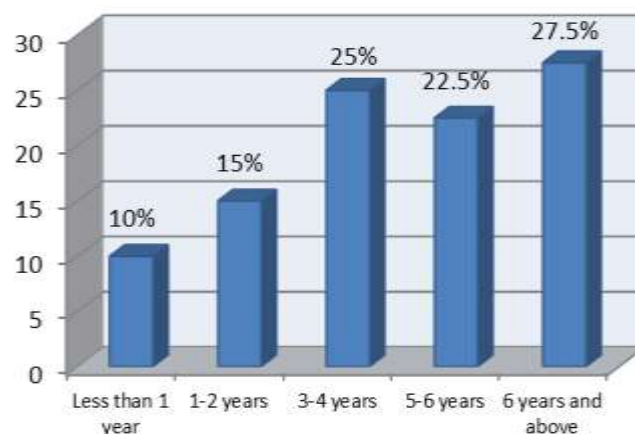


Figure 3. Years of Service by the Board Members

The board diversity variable was included in the demographic data to find out the composition and professional mix of the board. From the summary figure 4, members of the board who were farmers formed 20(50%), teachers 11(27.5%), civil servants 3(7.5%) and



business men 6(15%). There was disproportional professional diversity and composition among the board members. Majority of the members were self-employed including farmers and business community. There is need to have other professionals included to have value addition in management decisions and resolutions that can propel the school organization to the next level. Board diversity implies that the board members have different skills, knowledge and experience (figure 4). They are also from different age groups and social status. Effective board diversity leads to a greater knowledge base, creativity, higher quality decision making and innovation because of the diverse experience of members of the group, and therefore becomes a competitive advantage. However, in this study board diversity in public secondary schools was one area that needed be reviewed. The male composition was dominant with 65%. Subsistence farmers on the board were the majority with 50% followed by teachers most of whom had retired from the teaching service. The civil servants constituted 7.5% and business group 15%. This kind of composition had very little in terms of synergy that could lead to effective and quality decision making process. Although the composition of the boards of public secondary schools were diverse to some extent, this kind of diversity was not effective. This may to some level explain why some secondary schools engage professional strategists to make plans for them at a fee.

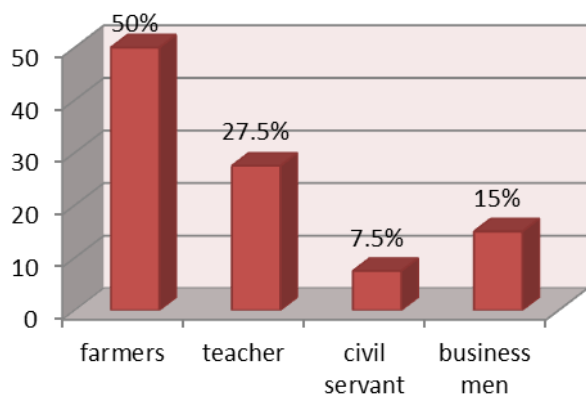


Figure 4. Board Diversity and Board Composition

Table 1 above is a summary of board of management members' responses regarding the strategic formulation and implementation roles they play in their respective public secondary schools. Objective one of the study sought to establish whether or not all public schools in Nambale Sub County developed strategic plans.

A questionnaire with eight items was developed for the respondents as shown in table 4.2. 85.5% (33) said the board of management had independent chairperson who was not the school principal. 32.5% of the respondents said that the board developed and formulated a strategic plan for their schools while 27.5% said sometimes the board played that role as 10% said rarely did the board do that. A sizeable number of (28) 70% said that the board developed school mission, vision, strategies and values which guided and gave direction to the school development.

When the board members were asked whether the school mission, vision and strategies were developed as part and parcel of the strategic plan document, (21) 52.5% of them said never (figure 5). Only (5) 12.5% said they always did develop the school mission, vision and strategies as part of the strategic plan document, while another (5) 12.5% said they rarely did it. From this scenario, the researcher observed that although most schools have school missions, visions and values written out on the walls and school gates, they are usually developed in isolation as stand-alone items for inspiration and as a requirement for conformity from the education office.

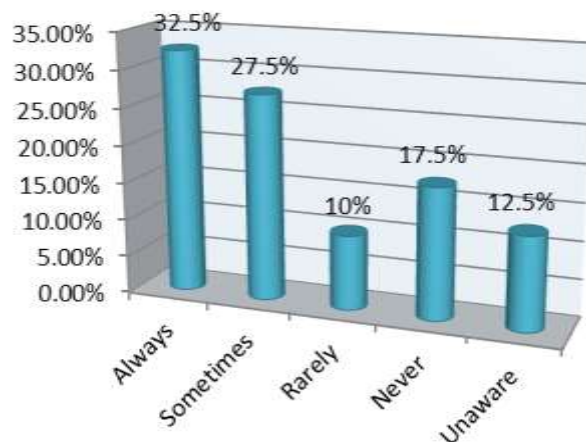


Figure 5. Strategic Plan Formulation and Implementation

A study by [4] did research on strategic management practices in parliament of Kenya to establish the strategic management practices undertaken at Parliament. The study was carried out through a case study design where the unit of study was sought to find out the strategic management practices at the Parliament of Kenya. The findings showed that the strategic planning processes were reviewed constantly in order to improve on performance and performance measures. The role of managers

was found crucial in the strategic management practices. The managers acted as the link between the organization and staff under them and also served as performance role models. The strategic steps and processes in planning and implementation included: evaluation of the

strategic plan; creation of vision for implementing the strategic plan; selection of team members to help implement the strategic plan; scheduling meetings to discuss progress reports and involving the upper management where appropriate.

Table 1. The Role of the Board in Strategic Management Practices

No.	Board's Strategic Formulation And Implementation Roles	A =5		S=4		R=3		N=2		U=1		M
		N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
1.	Board has independent chairperson who is not the school principal	33	82.5	6	15	1	2.5	0	0	0	0	4.8
2.	The board develops and formulates a strategic plan for the school	13	32.5	11	27.5	4	10	7	17.5	5	12.5	3.5
3.	The board sets school's mission, vision, strategies and values	28	70	5	12.5	4	10	0	0	3	7.5	4.3
4.	The board sets mission, vision and strategies as part of the strategic plan	5	12.5	9	22.5	5	12.5	21	52.5	0	0	2.3
5.	Board determines the overall school strategy from which departments derive their objectives, vision and values	19	47.5	7	17.5	6	15	4	10	4	10	2.2
6.	Board reviews and evaluates opportunities, threats and risks in the school environment and strengths, weaknesses of the school	10	25	5	12.5	4	10	20	50	1	2.5	3.0
7.	Board has measurement and feedback system to monitor performance and implementation of the strategy	11	27.5	3	7.5	3	7.5	23	57.5	0	0	1.7
8.	The board implements the strategy fully with clear critical success factors	6	15	4	10	5	12.5	23	57.5	2	5	2.2

Key: A-Always; S-Sometimes; R-Rarely; N-Never; U-Unaware.

Table 2 shows the summary of human resource management role of the board. The main purpose was to find out how the school board utilizes people as the most important and inimitable resource in a school organization. When the board members were asked whether they participated in the recruitment of staff, a good number of them (31) 77.5% said they did. Only (1) 2.5% was not aware and (1) 2.5% said rarely did they participate in the recruitment process. A sizeable number of the board members (21) 5.2%, said that they were involved in the selection and placement of staff after the recruitment and screening processes. (6) 15%

said only sometimes and another (6) 15% were not aware whether the board was involved in the selection and placement of staff. When the school board members were asked whether they had provision for induction and mentoring program for newly employed staff, only (3) 7.5% said yes they had but (28) 70% of the board respondents said no they did not have provision for induction and mentoring of the newly employed staff. Also, (7) 17.5% said rarely did they have induction and mentoring program for the newly employed. The authors of [9] carried out research to investigate the factors influencing the implementation of governing bodies in Post – Apartheid South Africa. The study revealed that

BOM needed managerial experience in human resource management to govern schools well. Moreover, the study found that thirty seven percent of parents, BOM members were inexperienced in HRM. This impacted negatively on the ability of the BOM to actively participate in decision-making process within the

school resource management. The governing bodies' performance was greatly undermined by lack of adequate training of board members. Consequently, the study reported that skills in general management and making informed judgments was wanting.

Table 2. Strategic Human Resource Management Role

No.	Strategic human resource management	A=5		S=4		R=3		N=2		U=1		S/W
		N	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	N	%	
1.	Board is involved in recruitment of staff	31	77.5	7	17.5	1	2.5	0	0	1	2.5	4.6
2.	Board has provision for induction and mentoring program	3	7.5	1	2.5	2	5	28	70	6	15	2.1
3.	The board provides for professional development	14	35	12	30	7	17.5	2	5	5	12.7	3.7
4.	Board conducts performance management of teachers as a routine	9	22.5	9	22.5	8	20	11	27.5	3	7.5	3.2
5.	Board is involved in matters of staff discipline	25	62.5	9	22.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	4	10	4.2
6.	Board has system of compensation and promotion of teachers	12	30	3	7.5	2	5	22	55	1	2.5	3.0
7.	The board meets to discuss exam results and has reward system for best performers	28	70	7	17.5	5	12.5	1	2.5	3	7.5	4.7
8	Board monitors academic performance and sanctions non-performers	7	17.5	11	27.5	7	17.5	13	32.5	2	5	3.2

Key: A-Always; S-Sometimes; R-Rarely; N-Never; U-Unaware

Regarding the professional development of teachers in classroom practice, figure 6 shows that (14) 35% of the respondents said they always planned for teachers continuous professional development, (12) 30% said sometimes and (7) 17.5% said rarely. However, it was not clear whether this professional development was in addition to the external professional training programs organized by the ministry and other educational agencies such as

Tusome and other NGOs. There is however, need that school boards at the school level provides for the continuous professional development of their teachers in classroom practice and management. A study conducted by [1] on strategic management of human capital in learning institutions concluded that an integrated goal had two outcomes by which progress could be measured: student performance and teaching performance, the latter indicated by measures of



instructional practice and effectiveness. The findings of my study found out that the boards of management of public secondary schools measured performance of students through the terminal KCSE examination results only as opposed to the functional practical skills of the students and ability to perform tasks and problem solving. Only 22.5% of the boards conducted performance management of teachers as routine activity (Figure 7).

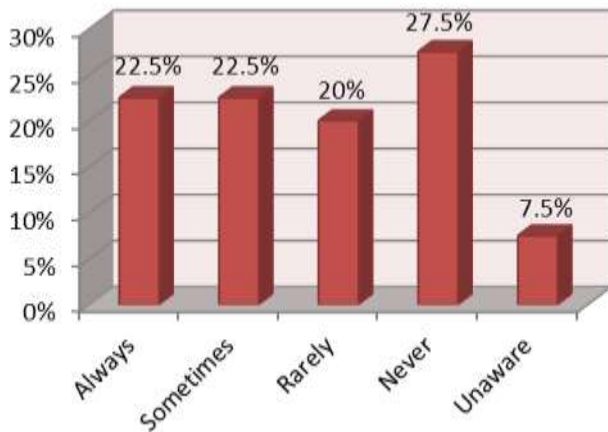


Figure 6. Strategic Human Resource Management Role

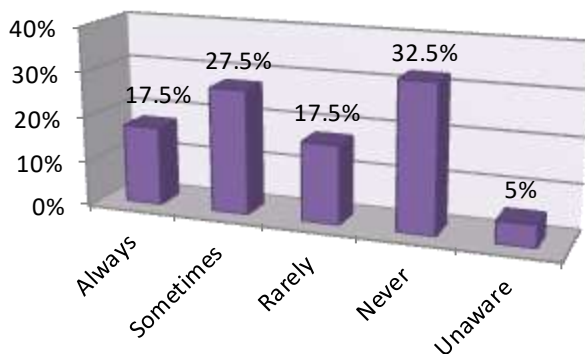


Figure 7. Academic Performance Monitoring Role

The findings of this research echoes the Commonwealth Secretariat Report [7] which showed that, the efficient use of other resources in the school depends on the skills and performance of the teacher within the educational systems. Teacher professional development would go a long way to sharpen the teacher as an inimitable most important resource in the school. Another study by [2] revealed that Board of management should be able to use motivators like the staff needs for achievement, recognition, responsibility, personal growth and advancement potential. Other needs such as

psychological, sociological and security needs should not be neglected. These were thought to be the basic needs that the staff would strive to achieve first before thinking about other high needs. The findings of my study found out that majority of public schools in Nambale Sub County recognized teachers' efforts by awarding those subjects which managed to post grades A minus and above in the KCSE exams.

## Conclusions

Public secondary schools in Nambale Sub County operate without strategic plans despite the ministerial decree that all government institutions must develop and operational strategic plans lasting three to five years. The few schools that had strategic plans did not follow the due process of strategic formulation. Schools tended to engage the services of the professionals in the area of strategic management to develop plans for their schools at a fee. The school board size was large in all the public secondary school with over ten members and in some cases twenty members and above. Some members of the board served more than the stipulated maximum period of two terms. Implementation of strategic plans for the few schools that had formulated them was poor and in some cases lacking. However, the performance management and appraisal system for the teaching staff was weak. Most schools lacked a clear reporting and feedback mechanism apart from the terminal KCSE examination at the end of the fourth form. Performance of the form one to three was hardly discussed by the board. There was lack of induction and mentoring programs for new staff. Public secondary school boards must provide for induction and mentoring program for the novice, newly employed staff to learn the culture of the school and pedagogical skills from the experienced staff. Also observed was the lack of performance management of staff. The board should conduct formative performance management and annual appraisal of its entire staff.

## Conflict of interest

Authors declare there are no conflicts of interest.

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