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School governance and sustainable quality education in public schools in Kenya

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Abstract

School governance plays a critical role in shaping the sustainable quality education in public schools in Kenya. Governance at all levels of education management influences decision-making processes, policy formulation and implementation, and prudent utilization of resources, leading to the achievement of infrastructural development and learners' learning outcomes. However, the quality of education has fluctuated over time under various leadership in the education sector, as well as school management. The study investigated the influence of school governance on sustainable quality education in public schools in Kenya. The objectives of the study included; examining the relationship between transparency, accountability, stakeholders' engagement, inclusivity and sustainable quality education in public schools. The study was anchored on the systems theory. Document analysis and qualitative methods were adopted. Qualitative analysis involved thematic analysis of recurring issues relating to school governance and sustainable quality education. The research findings revealed that schools experienced challenges in school governance practices such as transparency, accountability, stakeholders' engagement, and inclusivity, thereby affecting sustainable quality education. The study findings also affirmed that good governance practices by school management help sustain quality learning outcomes of the learners. The research findings further attribute governance challenges in schools to a lack of management of their roles as outlined in governance practices, which include transparency, accountability and stakeholders' engagements. The

study recommended that governance principles be integrated with the roles of school leaders to address sustainable quality education in public schools. It further recommended strengthening the capacity-building of school leaders on good governance practices in public schools.

Key terms: school governance, transparency, accountability, stakeholders' engagement, sustainable quality education

1.0 Introduction

School governance plays a critical role in shaping the sustainable quality education in public schools in Kenya. Effective governance guarantees prudent utilization of resources, effective policy formulation and implementation, and proper engagement of stakeholders, leading to the achievement of schools' goals (Arszulowicz, 2025). Despite the efforts put by the government in issuing directives that guide the operations of the schools' Boards of management, schools continue to face governance challenges that hinder progress in sustainable quality of education. These challenges include; conflict of interests, leadership inefficiencies, and policy inconsistencies (Kiprop, 2017 & Wainaina, 2021).

1.1 Background of the Study

The public schools strive to achieve sustainable quality education, which is indicated by performance. Performance in a school is guided by the principles of good governance in the management of schools. School leaders work for the achievement of learning outcomes through governance structures and processes in achieving sustainable quality education in public schools (Ministry of Education, 2023). The government initiatives include guidelines and policy directives that are issued to school management to comply with principles of good governance practices to enhance infrastructural development and improve learning outcomes. The achievement of sustainable quality education and it is the desire of many schools to realize. These initiatives aim at promoting environmental and socio-economic development education in schools by integrating sustainability concepts into the curriculum (Rieckmann, M., & Muñoz, R., 2024). Despite these efforts, challenges such as teacher shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient funding continue to hinder institutions' progress. Research indicates that addressing these challenges requires increased investment in capacity building of school management, increased capitation, as well as prompt disbursement of funds to institutions of learning (Muthoka, E., & Waswa, F.,2021).

The school leadership is committed to providing free and compulsory quality basic education. The government has partnered with various education stakeholders, including international education development agencies and private entities, to finance access to and quality education. These partnerships are keen on fostering learners' competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy that are aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is from this end that the government demand good governance practices in the management of government and donor funding. However, studies have highlighted governance inefficiencies in school management as key obstacles to achieving these objectives (Mwangi, 2023).

Strengthening governance structures is essential in overcoming these challenges. Transparency practices, accountability mechanisms, and stakeholder participation are required to ensure sustainable and quality education. The sustainable quality education in public schools can be achieved through improved learners' learning outcomes and improved infrastructural development that ensure a conducive learning environment. Research suggests that well-governed schools demonstrate better learners' performance in terms of safe and conducive infrastructure as well as improved learning outcomes (Likoko, S., Wafula, M., & Amadi, K., 2023). By addressing governance-related challenges, school

management is committed to enhancing and ensuring a sustainable quality education in learning environments.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite significant investments by the government and education development partners, as well as issuing policies that guide the management of schools, governance issues continue to be a challenge in improving sustainable quality education. The key governance issues hindering the achievement of learning outcomes and improved infrastructure for learning include; transparency, accountability, and stakeholders' participation. Although the government has increased education spending, reaching 19% of the total government budget in 2020, these funds often fall short of proper utilization (Wario, 2022). The lack of accountability impacts negatively on the efficiency in the use of available resources, thus accelerating disparities in education quality in marginalized communities.

The school management's lack of capacity to address governance issues in schools affects the learning outcomes and infrastructure improvement. The situation is further worsened by lack of adequate infrastructure, such as classrooms and sanitation facilities that facilitate learner's conducive environment. Additionally, governance challenges in schools, including transparency, accountability and public engagement, undermine efforts to improve sustainable quality education. Weak transparency, accountability mechanisms, lack of stakeholders' engagement, and inclusivity in schools have been identified as significant obstacles to achieving sustainable educational quality. Therefore, this study sought to explore the influence of school governance practices on the sustainable quality education in public schools in Kenya.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guided the study;

i) To examine the relationship between **transparency** and **sustainable quality education** in public schools in Kenya.

ii) To determine the relationship between **accountability**and **sustainable quality education** in public schools in Kenya.

iii) To assess how **stakeholders'publicparticipation** relates to **sustainable quality education** in public schools in Kenya.

iv) To investigate the relationship between **inclusivity**and**sustainablequalityeducation** in public schools in Kenya.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guide the research;

i) What is the relationship between transparency and sustainable quality education in public schools in Kenya?

ii) What is the relationship between accountability and sustainable quality education in public schools in Kenya?

iii) How does stakeholders' public participation relate to sustainable quality education in public schools in Kenya?

iv) What is the relationship between inclusivity and sustainable quality education in public schools in Kenya?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Empirical Review

2.1.1 Transparency and Sustainable Quality Education in Public Schools

Transparency in school governance is a key determinant of the sustainability of quality education delivery. Institutions of learning that embrace transparency are more likely to ensure effective policy implementation, efficient resource utilization, and equitable service delivery (Ministry of Education, 2021). The absence of transparency practices often results in corruption, mismanagement, and ultimately poor learning outcomes (Otengo, E, Oluoch, O., & Mogwambo, V., 2023). Empirical studies show that schools that have adopted transparency practices report higher levels of learner performance and community trust in the education system (Mustoip, Tabroni, Sulaiman, & Marliani, 2023). Principles of good governance have been identified as a key enabler of efficiency in the management of schools, access to real-time data, financial accountability, and informed decision-making in public schools (Chukwuemeka-Nworu, Chukwuji, & Thompson, 2024).

2.1.2Accountability and Sustainable Quality Education in Public Schools

School accountability frameworks significantly influence the quality of education and its long-term sustainability. Functional governance in terms of accountability fosters mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting, which are critical for sustaining improvements in quality service delivery by the Boards of Management (Ministry of Education, 2023). Poor accountability has been associated with ineffective resource allocation, infrastructure decay, and demotivated staff, which will then hinder learning outcomes (Baffoe Opoku, 2023). In marginalised and Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL) regions, inadequate management oversight has exacerbated governance challenges, leading to unequal educational opportunities (Amenya, 2024). Strengthening accountability through increased funding, digital tools, and school leadership capacity-building can contribute to improved school management and academic outcomes (Njenga, 2024; Solomon et al., 2022).

2.1.3Stakeholders' engagement and Sustainable Quality Education

The Constitution of Kenya (2010) stipulated that public participations in instrumental in the execution of matters affecting the public. The law states that any state organ or public office shall facilitate public participation on matters that relate to; formulation of policies, budgeting and financial management, and decision-making processes. Public participation, therefore, involves stakeholder engagement, which plays a pivotal role in sustaining quality education in public schools. Teachers, learners, parents, local communities, and other formal governance bodies such as Boards of Management (BoM) and Parents Associations (PAs) are essential actors in shaping school policies and management practices (Rijal, 2023). Legal provisions on public participation emphasize the need for inclusive decision-making, which enhances both transparency and accountability (Murugi & Mugwe, 2023). However, empirical studies highlight a lack of structured and effective stakeholder participation in many schools, leading to governance inefficiencies and stakeholder dissatisfaction (Murugi & Mugwe, 2023). Establishing collaborative decision-making mechanisms can mitigate conflicts, improve school performance, and support sustainable quality education.

2.1.4Inclusivity and Sustainable Quality Education

Inclusivity in education refers to the deliberate efforts by the government and development agencies to provide equitable access and learning opportunities to all learners regardless of their socio-cultural-economic status, gender, disability, or geographic location. Sustainable quality education cannot be

achieved without addressing barriers to participation and ensuring that marginalized and vulnerable groups are not left behind (Amenya, 2024). Studies show that schools in ASAL areas often lack infrastructure, trained personnel, and sensitization on inclusive policies that cater for the diverse needs of the learners (Baffoe Opoku, 2023). Research has revealed that inclusivity enhanced through community involvement, inclusive curricula, and policy frameworks that promote universal access to education. Efforts to improve inclusivity are often achieved through capacity-building, funding support, and policy frameworks on equity, sustainability and effectiveness of public education systems (Njenga, 2024).

2.2 Theoretical Review

The study was anchored on systems theory,whose proponent was Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968). The theory was relevant to the study since the school management systems operate under governance structures involving all stakeholders on matters relating to governance, policies, leadership and resource management (Nikiforova, 2023). The stakeholders, through the governance structures and principles of good governance, ensure that those in management work coherently with the governance principles. It is assumed that poor governance disrupts the system's efficiency, affecting education quality and sustainability. Proper school governance ensures proper coordination, accountability, and resource management, ultimately lead to better learning outcomes.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The study is conceptualized around two variables:**school governance**as the independent variable and**sustainable quality education**as the dependent variable. School governance is operationalized throughfour key dimensions:**transparency, accountability, stakeholders' participation, and inclusivity.** Sustainable quality education is measured through indicators such as **effective teaching and learning processes, improved learning outcomes, learner retention and completion rates, institutional effectiveness, and continuous quality improvement.** The study assumes that effective implementation of these school governance dimensions positively influences the attainment and sustainability of quality education in public schools.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopted documentary analysis and qualitative method to collect information based on thematic areas covered by research objectives. The Qualitative method provided a comprehensive analysis as well as a holistic understanding of governance challenges facing schools and the impact it has on the sustainable quality education and its sustainability (Creswell, J., & Plano Clark, V., 2023).). The information obtained from documentary analysis related to school governance and sustainable quality education. Qualitative analysis majorly involved thematic analysis to identify recurring school governance issues, stakeholders' perspectives and policy pronouncements (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

4.0 Results and Discussions

This section presents the findings and discussions of the study aligned with the research objectives, and supported with relevant empirical studies.

4.1 Transparency and Sustainable Quality Education in Public Schools in Kenya

The research study findings revealed evidence of public institutions failing to adhere to transparency practices which is considered a cornerstone of sustainable education delivery. The link between transparent governance and effective implementation of educational policies is paramount in creation of an enabling environment in a learning institution. The study has also revealed that schools with poor

governance practices such as mismanagement of resources often present poor learning outcomes.

The school management that engagement on the best practices usually have a policy requiring all financial records from the government capitation funds, development contributions, and donor support to be publicly displayed on a school noticeboard and shared during PTA meetings. This transparency builds trust among stakeholders and reduces misappropriation of financial resources in the school. As a result, stakeholders and he entire community contribute more willingly to school development, leading to the construction of new classrooms and improved learner performance. To curtail vested interests among some Boards of Management, schools have adopted an e-procurement system for school supplies, reducing manual transactions that often led to inflated costs. With real-time access to procurement records, the Board of Management (BoM) and parents' association can track purchases. This curtails corruption, ensures timely delivery of learning materials, and supports smooth curriculum implementation, contributing to better learning outcomes and higher retention rates.

Mustoip et al. (2023) demonstrated that transparency leads to higher teacher and learner motivation, improved learner performance, and increased community trust. Moreover, Chukwuemeka-Nworu et al. (2024) provided robust evidence that digital tools enhance transparency by improving financial accountability and decision-making in the management schools. Collectively, these findings reveal a strongly significant positive relationship between transparency and sustainable quality education.

4.2 Accountability and Sustainable Quality Education

The policy documents on accountability indicate that school management have established accountability mechanisms and frameworks to ensure that monitoring, evaluation, and reporting that form an integral part of quality education sustainability. These frameworks ensure continuous assessment and improvement in service delivery. Baffoe O., (2023) & Amenya (2024) present empirical evidence linking poor accountability to mismanagement, resource wastage, and weak infrastructure, especially in marginalized regions like ASAL areas. Conversely, studies by

The governance principle on accountability spelled out the role and responsibility of school Boards of Management in the execution of their oversight roles in the school. The research study revealed that most of the school managements have developed accountability structures that enhance quality teaching and learning and improve learners learning outcomes. The Boards of Management in most schools have made heads of institutions to signs performance contracting, outlining key deliverables like learning outcomes, infrastructural development and sustainability measures on the quality of education. These are monitored through regular review meetings and reports to the Sub-committees. The study also observed that schools' management have introduced digital system that identifies and addressed teacher absenteeism and learner truancy, thus improving learners' discipline and performance. Njenga (2024) show that capacity building of accountability systems in schools significantly improve school governance and achievement of learning outcomes as well as sustainable quality education in public schools in Kenya.

4.3 Stakeholders' Engagement and Sustainable Quality Education

The documentary analysis indicated that inclusive decision-making not only builds ownership but also enhances transparency and accountability among the school stakeholders. Effective Boards of Management utilize the stakeholders in diverse areas of need to make them contribute to the schools' development where they are endowed. Stakeholders are instrumental in the development of a school strategic plan where teachers, parents, students, and local community are genuinely engaged. Stakeholders collectively prioritize needs of the school such as a science laboratory, sanitary facilities, and special needs resources. The participatory process strengthens community ownership and support as

well as improving infrastructural development and learners well-being.

However, the research findings revealed the existence of governance challenges such as inconsistent stakeholders' participation structures, limited stakeholders' influence on decision making, and compromise school governance practices and their effectiveness in promoting sustainable quality education. Rijal (2023) and Murugi & Mugwe (2023) provide documentary and empirical backing for the critical role of stakeholders such as teachers, learners, parents, and the local community in in their engagement of school development agenda and governance. The research findings affirmed that stakeholders structured public participation, inclusivity, and collaborative participation models significantly influenced sustainable quality education in public schools.

4.4 Inclusivity and Sustainable Quality Education in Public Schools in Kenya

An inclusive school is where all the learners are afforded education opportunities irrespective of their socio-economic-cultural backgrounds and abilities. The research study revealed that Boards of Management ensures that resources are distributed equitably and that the teachers employ appropriate and inclusive pedagogies, and provide special attention learners marginalised communities, enhance learners' enrolment, retention and significantly improvement learning outcomes. Infrastructural development embrace inclusivity by incorporating building of ramps, adapting toilets, and providing assistive learning devices which assist learners with disabilities participate in the learning process. The school Boards of Management retrain teachers and support staff on inclusive education approaches. These efforts lead to increased enrolment of learners with disabilities and greater community appreciation of inclusive education principles.

Amenya (2024) and Baffoe Opoku (2023) supported documentary and empirical evidence showing that without inclusivity, particularly in marginalized and disadvantaged communities and sustainability in education was observed being compromised in the institutions of learning. These sources show how gaps in infrastructure, policy, and trained personnel negatively impact equitable access to learning. Solomon et al. (2022) and Njenga (2024) further illustrate that inclusive education is enhanced through community engagement, adaptable curricula, and targeted policy support. The study findings revealed that interventions directly address systemic exclusion and promote long-term educational sustainability.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study sought to explore the relationship between governance principles; transparency**,** accountability, stakeholders' engagement, and inclusivity as well as the attainment of sustainable quality education in public schools in Kenya. The literature review drew on both documentary sources and empirical studies, established the integral role of school governance in shaping infrastructural development and learners learning outcomes. The review revealed that transparency improves policy implementation, promotes equitable resource allocation, and boosts community trust. Accountability frameworks enable the monitoring of school performance and service delivery efficiency.

Stakeholders' engagement and inclusivity in decision-making processes strengthens the linkage between schools and communities. Finally, inclusivity ensures equitable learning opportunities for marginalized and vulnerable groups, which is fundamental for sustainable education quality education.

5.1Conclusions

The study concludes that transparency in school governance significantly contributes to sustainable quality education through enhanced accountability, reduced corruption, and efficient resource use in public schools. Accountability mechanisms drive performance by ensuring proper utilization of resources,

and promoting staff motivation. The study revealed that accountability significantly contributed positively to achieving sustainable quality education. Stakeholders' engagement is a critical enabler of sustainable quality education. The effectiveness of stakeholder engagement has been hindered by weak structures, limited capacity, and inconsistent involvement. Inclusivity is not only a moral imperative but a practical requirement for sustainable quality education. Without targeted interventions, marginalized learners continue to face systemic barriers that reduce sustainable quality education. The study concludes that the research findings revealed that schools experienced challenges in school governance practices such as; transparency, accountability, stakeholders' engagement, and inclusivity, thereby affecting sustainable quality education. The study findings also affirmed that good governance practices by school management help sustain quality learning outcomes of the learners. The research findings further attribute governance challenges in schools to lack of Managements of their roles as outlined in governance practices which include transparency, accountability and stakeholders' engagements.

5.2Recommendations

The research study recommends the following:

i) Strengthen governance structures to promote transparency by leveraging digital tools for open data access, financial reporting, and participatory monitoring in school management.

ii) Enhance accountability frameworks through regular monitoring, performance evaluations, and targeted leadership development programs for school leaders.

iii) Institutionalize stakeholder engagement by creating structured stakeholder engagement, platforms for engagement and training stakeholders on their roles in the levels of engagement in decision-making processes.

iv) Implement inclusive education policies that address the needs of learners with disabilities as well as learners from disadvantaged backgrounds through the investment in infrastructure and adaptive curricula.

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