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Stakeholders' collaboration: A determinant of a school's compliance with safety standards

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Abstract

Learner safety is fundamental to quality education, as secure school environments promote effective teaching and learning. However, recurring school tragedies continue to raise concerns about compliance with safety standards. This study examined the influence of Board of Management (BoM) collaboration with stakeholders on compliance with safety standards in public boarding secondary schools in Embu County, Kenya. Guided by the pragmatic research philosophy, the study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design targeting 64 public boarding secondary schools across five sub-counties. Stratified sampling was used to select 55 schools, while purposive sampling identified 275 Heads of Departments and five Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. The study involved 445 respondents, including BoM chairpersons, Parents Association chairpersons, BoM secretaries, and education officials. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and observation schedules. Instrument validity was established through expert judgement, while Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.887 and 0.965 confirmed high reliability. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficient, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Findings revealed a strong positive correlation between stakeholder collaboration and compliance with school safety standards, indicating that effective partnerships contribute significantly to safer learning environments. The study concludes that stakeholder collaboration is essential for strengthening institutional safety management and regulatory compliance. It recommends that school boards establish and sustain functional partnerships with parents, government agencies, and safety organizations to mobilize financial resources, enhance safety training, and improve access to essential safety services in public boarding secondary schools.

Key terms: Board of Management, compliance, safety standards, collaboration, public boarding secondary schools

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Mubita (2021) notes that learners and staff must feel safe before they can focus their energy on school processes like teaching and learning. School children's well-being remains a global concern because of recurring tragedies. School shootings have taken many lives and caused extensive fear in the United States. In the recent past, Sandy Hook Elementary School lost 26 people, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School lost 17 students, and in a Texas school, 10 lives were lost (Limber & Kowalski, 2020). In 2014, the Taliban pounced on the Peshawar Army School, leaving 135 children dead -the Peshawar School Massacre (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2017. In Nigeria, schools have been destroyed, and others closed, teachers and children killed or scared out of school. According to Nduka (2021), in February 2021, 300 students were abducted from the Government Girls Science Secondary School, Zamfara State, while 27 were abducted from the Government Science College-Karara, Niger State, incidents comparable to the 2014 kidnapping of 276 girls from Chibok Senior Girls Secondary School.

In Kenya, loss of life and destruction of property worth millions characterise a lack of safety in schools. In 1991, 19 girls died from rape and suffocation at St. Kizito Mixed Secondary School, while in 1998, 26 girls died in a dormitory fire at Bombolulu Girls Secondary School. In 1999, four prefects of Nyeri High School died in a fire, while 68 boys died in a dormitory fire at Kyanguli Secondary School in 2001 (Achieng, 2026). This disaster profile led the government to focus on school safety, prompting the 2001 Wangai Report on safety measures. However, these measures did not prevent school disasters, prompting the Ministry of Education [MoE], in collaboration with the Church World Service, to develop the Safety Standards Manual for Schools in Kenya, published in 2008, believing that school compliance would help promote safe, secure environments at all levels.

Despite the government’s efforts, learners have continued to lose their lives in school fires, attacks and accidents. In 2010, a fire at Endarasha Boys’ Secondary School killed two boys, while Asumbi Girls’ Primary School lost eight girls to a dormitory fire in 2012 (Bett, 2026). In 2017, eight students died, and dozens were injured in the Moi Girls, Nairobi School dormitory fire (Achieng, 2026), while a militia attack at Lokichogio Mixed left six students and a guard dead, and girls raped (Ali, 2017). Moreover, three students died while six suffered spinal and abdominal injuries when a Lokichar Secondary School bus rolled over in Kabarnet (Ahenda & Kahenda, 2017). In 2019, nine pupils died, and 60 were injured when Precious Talent Academy collapsed. In February 2020, 14 learners died in a stampede at Kakamega Primary due to structural weaknesses (Nyaundi, 2020). Three Chogoria Girls High School students died on 18th December 2021 after the matatu they were travelling in collided with a lorry at Kambiti in Muranga on the busy Nyeri- Nairobi High way (Gikandi, 2021), on March 30th 2023, 18 students of Pwani University died when the bus they were travelling in collided head-on with a matatu at the Kayole Bridge along the Nakuru-Nairobi highway, four students were knocked by a Tahmeed bus when walking home from school, death of five students of Mbihi Friends Girls High School when a matatu they were travelling in collided head-on with a truck at the Delamere black spot on 19th April 2023 (Muia, 2023). Additionally, three girls and a teacher from Mukhumu Girls also died because of contaminated water (Rubadiri, 2023). The most recent incidents of dormitory fires include the 2024 Hillside Endarasha Academy, which claimed the lives of 21 boys, and the May 2026 Utumishi Girls Academy, where 16 girls lost their lives and 79 sustained serious injuries (Bett, 2026).

To enhance learner safety, countries have developed safety policies, and compliance with set safety standards is thus a significant factor in achieving inclusive safety. The task of implementing government policies and guidelines is delegated to school management bodies. In the United States, public schools

are governed and managed by school boards (Shober & Hartney, 2014), while Bakwai, Yisa, and Musa, 2015; Eslinger, 2017 and Mgadla, 2014 confirm management by boards in British Columbia, School-Based Management Committees for Nigeria and School Governing Bodies in South Africa, respectively. In Kenya, Boards of Management are obligated by section 59 of the Basic Education Act [BEA] 2013 with school governance: provide proper and adequate infrastructure; determine indiscipline cases; facilitate students' guidance and counselling; ensure the safety of learners and workers; and encourage participatory democratic governance, all aimed at ensuring the safety of the school community (Republic of Kenya, 2013). According to Mugai (2019), good institutional governance relates to leadership holding fast to ethics, good morals, and virtues in decision making, operationalisation of policies, while providing strategic direction and engaging learners and the school communities in the best interest of children. To guide institutions in fulfilling their missions and visions, BoMs should focus on learners' needs as outlined in the school safety policy (MoE, 2008). As schools seek to promote academic performance, there is therefore a need to build a physically and emotionally safe environment for the school community, as safety in school will allow learners and staff to look forward to being in a promising environment that can support social and creative learning (Mubita, 2021)

Embu County has in the last three decades, experienced a high number of cases of student unrest, with arson targeting dormitories. Embu has also recorded other cases of safety breaches, making the county suitable for the current study. In addition, most studies on school safety have failed to investigate the influence of Boards of Management governance strategies like collaboration for partnerships, influencing compliance with safety standards, thus creating a gap for this study to fill.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Schools are expected to be sanctuaries for all school going children, as learners' safety is key to the delivery of quality education. However, this has not been the case in Kenya, as secondary schools continue to experience shocking incidents of arson, unrest, armed conflict and drug abuse. Compliance with the Safety Standards Manual (2008) is expected to make schools safe and secure environments. The National Crime Research Centre (2017) confirmed that over 130 schools (an average of three schools per county) were closed in 2016 due to unrest, violence and arson targeting dormitories.

In Embu County, arson targeted dorms. As Ndonga (2016) reported, Embu and Nakuru counties were among the counties that had recorded a high number of cases in 2015 and made a comeback in 2016 with an equally high number of cases (six in each year). The trend has been on the rise, with Embu recording eight and nine cases of arson in 2017 and 2018, respectively, while Nakuru cases declined to zero and one in the two years. In 2018, Eastern Region recorded the highest number of unrest cases: 40, out of which 22 were arson, followed by Nyanza with 17 and Rift Valley with 12 (Departmental Committee on Education and Research – National Assembly, 2019). While Embu County recorded 9 out of the 22 cases recorded in the region, the neighbouring counties of Tharaka Nithi recorded six; Machakos, two; and Kitui, two (MoE, 2018). In 2019, a Form Three student died from corporal punishment administered by a Mathematics teacher in one of the big boarding schools in the county (Muchiri, 2019). Furthermore, a study by Mugai (2019) established that school managers in Lower parts of Embu were yet to overcome retrogressive cultures that discriminated against learners, especially girls, while female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage favoured boys over girls. Additionally, children with disabilities remained marginalised in accessing education in the county (Muigai,2019).

According to the Regional Director of Education, Eastern (2021), Embu County was leading in the post-COVID number of arson cases in the region as well as nationally. A collation of data by the Ministry of Education following the wave of school unrest witnessed in 2026 indicated that the Rift Valley region was leading in the number of cases, followed by Nairobi, while third came the Eastern region with 24 cases, of

which 14 were recorded in Embu (MoE, 2026).

The cases indicate a lack of safety leading to property damage, threats to students' and staff's wellbeing and lives, and loss of cherished learning time. The Basic Education Act of 2013 tasks Boards of Management with upholding students' welfare and human rights, and ensuring their safety (RoK, 2013). Schools must be managed adequately to ensure safety for quality education. The safety of children should be everyone's business, as they remain vulnerable to all the possible security and safety threats and outcomes; hence the need for the school management to partner with key stakeholders and safety agencies for support in the implementation of safety programmes. There was therefore a need to examine the influence of BoMs' collaboration efforts on compliance with safety standards in public boarding secondary schools.

1.2 Objective of the Study

This study aimed to examine the influence of stakeholder collaboration on school compliance with safety standards in public boarding secondary schools

1.3 Research Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between stakeholder collaboration and compliance with safety standards in public boarding secondary schools

2.0 Literature Review

Collaboration is critical to achieving and maintaining school safety. Maynard (2017) argues that safety requires unified, collective management and that all stakeholders have a role in school safety and emergency management plans. Moreover, coordinated effort in school management and other aspects of the community builds and sustains inclusive, honest relationships that foster confidence, team spirit, consensus, and open communication. This promotes school safety by assuring the school population of care and support. According to Samaila, Ibrahim, and Audi (2025), effective neighbourhood collaboration among various stakeholders can control school insecurity. Furthermore, Ngulube, Kalumbi, and Siakalima (2024) argue that community actors such as non-governmental organisations, religious institutions, and local governance bodies have a role in shaping behaviour and thus school safety, a role underestimated by formal disciplinary planning.

Mgadla (2014) argues that school safety is a departmental duty that requires the involvement of the immediate community, either as guards or by allowing the use of school grounds as gardens or for religious functions to limit burglaries. Kisurulia, Katiambo and Lutomia (2013) noted that schools were not sufficiently equipped to deal with tragedies or crises single-handedly. The study confirmed that schools were inadequately prepared to handle disasters and recommended the development of a comprehensive safety and emergency preparedness policy, as well as the sensitisation of all MoE directorates and key stakeholders. The researchers also called on the government and schools to coordinate synergistic responses by collaborating with international and national humanitarian organisations.

The school safety policy in Kenya (MoE, 2008) observes that safety is overwhelming and should be everyone's business through collaboration efforts. Managers are key actors in building robust partnerships and should liaise with Quality and Standards Assurance Officers [QASOs] and the Teacher Advisory Centre [TAC] officers to ensure routine advisory visits (MoE, 2008). Collaborating for teamwork with public works, public health, Ministry of Health [MoH], churches, National Transport and Safety Authority [NTSA], Red Cross Kenya, National Campaign against Drug Abuse [NACADA], the police, fire brigades, NGOs and other humanitarian agencies would assure schools of expertise, finances, material

support, and services for effective execution of safety programmes.

The policy recommends school collaboration with health agencies, parents and communities on issues relating to learners' health and feeding as a way of retaining them in schools and enhancing their concentration and capacity to learn. The research sought to establish if BoMs in Embu County had established collaborative working relationships with safety and security agencies like the Red Cross, National Campaign against Drug Abuse (NACADA), churches, National Transport and Safety Authority (NTSA), Ministry of Education, the police, Ministry of Health, fire department, and NGOs for support

Embu County has in the last three decades experienced a high number of cases of student unrest, with arson targeting dormitories. Embu has also recorded other cases of safety breaches, making the county a suitable site for the study. In addition, many of the studies on school safety failed to investigate the influence of collaboration with stakeholders as a Boards of Management governance strategy on compliance with safety standards, a gap this paper fills.

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This section describes the research design, target population, sample size and sampling procedure, data collection instruments, instruments' validity, instruments' reliability, data collection procedures and data analysis techniques.

3.2 Research design

The study adopted a pragmatist philosophy, which allows the researcher to focus on the research problem rather than on methods and to use a variety of approaches for collecting and analysing data, which subsequently derives knowledge to best understand the problem (Creswell & Creswell 2023). The study also used the convergent mixed-methods research design, which entails the collection and integration of quantitative and qualitative data in a study. The design involves examining both types of data and incorporating them to compare the outcomes (Leavy, 2017). This approach was appropriate as this study aimed to describe, explain, and examine school safety which is a complex problem.

3.3 Target population

This is the whole collection of individuals or items the scholar has selected to study (Matula et al., 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2023) hold that a study population is made up of the people who the researcher aims to make inferences about. Embu County has 64 public boarding secondary schools: 12 boys' and 15 girls' boarding, 3 girls' day/boarding, 7 mixed boarding and 27 mixed day/boarding secondary schools. 64 BoM and 64 Parents Association chairpersons, 64 BoM Secretaries, and 576 Heads of Departments [HoDs] from the schools, and 5 Sub-County Quality and Standards Officers formed a target population of 773 subjects.

3.4 Sampling procedures and sample size

Makwana, Engineer, Dabhi and Chudasama (2023) describe a sample as a collection of

individuals or things collected from a large population for measurement in research. According to Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen (2010), a sample is a representative portion of the study population and should correctly represent the group traits under examination if generalisation with reasonable confidence from the sample to the population is to be made. Kothari and Garg (2024) postulate that an ideal sample ought to be adequate to give satisfactory representation to a population about which the researcher wants to

generalise. Using Slovin's formula n=N/ [1+N (e) 2], where n = sample size; N= finite population; e = level of significance; 1= unit or a constant, the study arrived at a sample of 55 boarding schools. Furthermore, stratified sampling helped choose schools from each category to ensure a proportional sample size in relation to the sizes of the strata from which they were drawn. Heads of departments in the sampled schools were represented by: Guidance and Counselling, Sciences, Technical, Boarding, and Co-Curricular Activities

Table 1: Study sample size

Study population	Target population	Sampling method	Sample size	%	Data collection instrument
BoM chairs	64	Purposive	55	85.9	Interview schedule
BoM secretaries	64 64	Stratified proportionate	55 55	85.9 85.9	Interview schedule Interview schedule
	576		275	47.7	Questionnaire
QASOs	5 773		5 445	100 57.6	Interview schedule

3.5 Research instruments

Creswell and Creswell (2023) describe a study instrument as a device for collecting measures of variables or characteristics of the study population. Three types of research instruments were used: a questionnaire, interview schedules and an observation schedule to collect data from participants and the sampled schools. The questionnaires were suitable because the researcher managed to collect data from different schools in a short time, and being a standard instrument, it gave room for uniformity of answers to the questions, making comparison of the answers obtained from different respondents a possibility (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Kothari and Garg (2024) allude to the fact that a questionnaire is free from the researchers' biases, while Mugenda and Mugenda (2019) hold that it allows anonymity of respondents and uniformity of question items which allows comparability. An interview schedule allows the interviewer to clarify any questions that are ambiguous and can ask the respondent to expand on answers that are particularly important or revealing (Frankel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). Further, Ary et al. (2010) hold that interviews aid in revealing people's experiences and their meaning, hence suitable for this study. An observation schedule is an essential research data collection tool that allows visual observation to be turned into useful data. An observation schedule allows the researcher to directly record what is observed as first-hand and objective data; thus, it provides more reliable and accurate data that can complement other instruments (Gatua, 2015).

3.6 Instrument validity

Instrument validity is concerned with how accurately the research items represent the concept in question and not something else. Validity is thus a measure of whether one can draw accurate inferences from the scores on the instrument used (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Mukhejee (2020) posits that validity relates to the question of whether the instrument measures what it purports to measure. According to Stephen and Velmurugan (2020), validity is the measure that helps the researcher gauge results according to the objective of the research and nothing else. Expert judgement and peer review were used to determine the content validity and face validity of the study instruments.

3.7: Instrument reliability

Creswell and Creswell (2023) describe instrument reliability as the consistency or repeatability of an instrument. According to Mukhejee (2020), reliability is the consistency or stability with which the instrument measures what it does measure. It is the ability of a tool to measure what it is measuring while providing stable and consistent results when used repeatedly (Stephen & Velmurugan, 2020). According to Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013), reliability explains the extent to which the observable or empirical measures representing a theoretical concept are accurate and stable when used to measure the concept in several studies or on a regular basis.

The study's instrument reliability was ascertained using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was computed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The coefficient ranges between 0 and 1, and the nearer it is to 1, the higher the reliability. A coefficient of 0.965 indicates high reliability of the questionnaire.

4.0 Data presentation, analysis, interpretation

This section covers the analysis, presentation and interpretation of data collected on the influence of Boards of Management collaboration on compliance with safety standards in public boarding secondary schools in Embu County, Kenya. The analysis involved sorting the data into integral portions and assessing them to separate the component elements independently and relative to the whole. It included coding, data recording and examination to enhance interpretation. Qualitative information from observation guides, interview guides and the open-ended questionnaire responses was analysed thematically to form themes, with respondents' opinions and feelings being coded and put into frequencies and percentages. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and presented in a frequency distribution table. Inferential statistics tested the null hypothesis.

4.1 Results from closed ended questions

The school safety policy recognizes the BoMs as the key actors in building strong partnerships. This study thus felt the need to establish whether the Boards of Management of boarding secondary schools in Embu County collaborated with various partners with an aim of promoting safety in their school environments. The study findings are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Partners' collaboration for safety

	SA		A		U		D		SD		Mean
	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	
The school partners with local health facilities for support	120	47.4	107	42.3	15	5.9	2	.8	9	3.6	4.30
The school sponsor gives psychosocial and spiritual support	150	59.3	90	35.6	3	1.2	1	.4	9	3.6	4.47
The school maintains contact with the local fire brigade	61	24.1	97	38.3	54	21.3	15	5.9	26	10.3	3.60
Local administration helps resolve school-community conflict	85	33.6	123	48.6	32	12.6	10	4.0	3	1.2	4.09

Buildings are inspected and approved by public works	120	47.4	95	37.5	26	10.3	7	2.8	5	2.0	4.26
The school collaborates with the police for safety surveillance	87	34.4	104	41.1	41	16.2	12	4.7	9	3.6	3.98
School seeks support from MoE departments to enhance safety	81	32.0	118	46.6	39	15.4	8	3.2	7	2.8	4.02
The school works with local communities for support and protection	74	29.2	142	56.1	25	9.9	8	3.2	4	1.6	4.08
The school works with local NGOs for material support	36	14.2	99	39.1	72	28.5	17	6.7	29	11.5	3.38
Grand Mean											3.94

Schools should collaborate with health service providers and local authorities to promote good health and hygiene among the learners. During outbreaks of contagious diseases, the school administration should inform the local medical officer or health personnel immediately (MoE, 2008). The Kenya school health guidelines require institutions to ensure that a qualified nurse oversees the dispensary or sanatorium, or work with local health centres to manage learners' health related issues (MoE, 2020). The findings on whether Embu boarding secondary schools partnered with local health facilities for health support services are presented in Table 2 above.

The results show that 227 (89.7%) respondents agreed that their schools partnered with local health facilities for support, implying collaboration on health and safety matters. However, the remaining 26 (10.3%) should work with the nearest health facility to address the schools' medical issues in times of need. The findings agree with Alunga and Maiyo (2019) who noted that 65% of respondents agreed that students' sickness was attended to with urgency to enhance their safety.

Psychosocial aspects of life refer to the dynamic relationship between a person's mental health: emotions, feelings, reactions and thought processes, their socio-cultural environments, relationships, family, social values, cultural practices and community networks. Psychosocial support refers to preventive and curative actions that address both psychological and social needs of the individuals, families and communities (MoE, 2020). During COVID-19, learners suffered psychologically and emotionally due to the loss of parents, guardians, close relatives and even teachers to the virus. Today, learners continue to experience innumerable and immeasurable psychosocial problems and challenges both at home and in schools, and this has resulted in discipline breakdown, and many have resorted to unruliness and suicide.

This study sought to find out if Embu boarding secondary schools' sponsors gave psychosocial and spiritual support to the students as a means of enhancing their emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing that would translate to enhanced school safety. From the results presented in Table 2, most school sponsors, 240 (94.9%) give psychosocial and spiritual support to the students in Embu County boarding secondary schools. This was confirmed by BoM members who asserted that there were arrangements for sponsors to visit schools weekly, twice weekly and when called upon outside the set visiting days. The Catholic-sponsored schools reported more regular engagements as there were Friday morning Mass, Sunday Mass, and Thursday evening pastoral visits done fortnightly. However, District Education Board (DEB) sponsored schools suffered as they had to liaise with the nearest church or congregation for these visits. According to one of the BoM secretaries, the MoE was changing the narrative by constantly training

Religious Education teachers to undertake the role of school chaplaincy while still engaging the various sponsors where applicable.

The safety policy requires that learners are not only sensitised to the dangers of fire through the relevant sections of the curriculum, but also that the local fire department is invited to give talks on fire prevention in a school context and to conduct periodic fire drills. Fire outbreaks in school buildings pose a serious threat to human life, causing death or injury, and to property. In the event of a fire in a school, the fire department or other relevant authorities should be called to help extinguish the fire after ensuring that learners are evacuated from a burning building (MoE, 2008). Maintaining contact with the department would thus ensure that a school's management has the required fire services in case of a fire outbreak in an institution. Motivated by this, the study sought to determine whether schools maintained contact with local fire brigades.

The results in Table 2 revealed that 158 (62.4%) respondents agreed that boarding secondary schools in Embu County maintained contact with the local fire brigades for safety support in terms of knowledge, skills and services to enhance fire safety in the schools. Additionally, a notable number, 95 (37.6%), either disagreed or opted to remain undecided. This implies that the respondents' schools would not immediately call for support from the fire department in the event of a fire outbreak in the school, and this may mean a devastating outcome.

For a school to share in its safety vision with the local communities, the management should develop relationships with the communities around while encouraging them to cooperate with the school in ensuring learners' and staff safety. The local communities should be encouraged to use local administrative structures and authority to resolve school-community conflicts (MoE, 2008). This study sought to establish whether local administration helped resolve school-community conflicts.

As depicted in Table 2, 208 (82.2%) participants agreed that local administration helped resolve school-community conflict whenever it occurred. Of the respondents, 13 (5.2%) disagreed, albeit at different levels, that the local administration helped resolve school-community. There was a need for the remaining 45 (17.8%) participants' schools to borrow the good practices to enhance school safety.

School buildings include classrooms, laboratories, dormitories, libraries, offices and even the school kitchen. The buildings should be adequate, appropriate and properly located, devoid of any risks to the users and those around them. The buildings are expected to comply with Ministry of Public Works building standards (MoE, 2008). The public works department is expected to carry out an assessment on appropriateness of the completed building for use and issue a certificate of occupancy to show that the building is approved and safe for use. This study sought to establish whether boarding secondary schools' buildings were inspected to ascertain the safety of the buildings before use.

From the research results in Table 2, it can be deduced that the majority (84.96%) of the respondents' schools' buildings in Embu County boarding secondary schools were inspected and approved by the public works before occupancy as a way of assuring the users of the safety of the infrastructure. However, the findings disagreed with a study by Alunga and Maiyo (2019) that indicated that only 30% of respondents agreed to their schools' buildings being assessed and approved by the Ministry of Public Works before occupancy. The researchers also confirmed that many teachers were ignorant of what happened in their schools pertaining to new infrastructure, with 50% remaining undecided on whether public works approved new buildings.

To create safe and caring environments for learners and staff, the school management should collaborate with law enforcement agencies and more so the police, to help upscale surveillance in a bid to ensure that the school is free from external threats and infiltration of drugs and substances into the school. This study sought to establish from the respondents whether their schools' management worked with the local

police for safety surveillance backup.

The study findings indicate that 191 (75.5%) of the respondents agreed, albeit to different degrees, that their schools collaborated with police for safety surveillance. However, 21 (8.3 %) disagreed, while 41 (16.2%) of the respondents remained undecided. The results indicated that most schools' management worked closely with the local police to enhance safety surveillance for the safety of the boarding secondary schools. The interviewed BoM members confirmed that they collaborated with the police through the officers commanding the local police stations (OCSs) to enhance safety by: utilizing police intelligence in backing up schools' surveillance efforts to enhance safety, reporting crimes like theft for investigation, police offering patrols of the school compound for early detection of safety threats and community sensitization on safety and security. The BoM secretaries confirmed that they had even formed WhatsApp groups with local police officers for ease of sharing safety information.

The presence of government officials like the Ministry of Education officers in the life of a school means that a school is headed in the right direction in promoting school safety. The safety policy recognises the role of the Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs) in assessing and monitoring school safety as part of their routine advisory visits to the schools (MoE, 2008). The study thus sought to establish whether the boards of management collaborated with MoE officers to enhance their schools' safety. Results in Table 2 show that 199 (78.6%) of the respondents confirmed that their schools sought support from the MOE department to enhance safety. 15 (6.0%) disagreed, while 39 (15.4%) of the respondents remained undecided, meaning they could not determine whether their schools sought support from MOE departments to enhance safety. From the results, it can be inferred that the majority, 78.6% of the respondents' schools, sought support from MoE officers in their bid to enhance school safety.

School-community collaboration points towards learners, parents or guardians and community members without children in the school working together and in harmony for the good of the school. Schools are expected to collaborate with the local community in the management of the school affairs. This is achieved through appointments to the school boards of management. The Basic Education Act No.14 of 2013, Section 56 requires that there are 6 persons appointed to the BoM to represent parents of learners in the schools or local community in case of county secondary schools.

This study sought to find out if the boarding secondary schools in Embu County worked with the local communities for support and protection as a means of enhancing school safety. The study results in Table 2 depict 216 (85.3%) of the respondents agreeing that their schools worked with the local community for support and protection, while 12 (4.8%) did not. Moreover, 25 (9.9 %) of the respondents remained undecided. It can thus be deduced that many of the boarding secondary schools in Embu County work with the local community for support and protection.

The visible presence of key stakeholders such as representatives of NGOs in providing material, psychological and spiritual needs of the learners and staff is an indication that a school is safe (MoE,2008). This study wanted to find out from the respondents whether their schools worked with local NGOs for material support to enhance school safety and security. The Table 2 results indicate that 135 (53.3%) of the respondents agreed that their schools worked with local NGOs for material support in enhancing school safety. However, 46 (18.2%) disagreed, though to varying degrees, while 72 (28.5%) remained undecided. It can thus be inferred that only 53.3% of the respondents confirmed the presence of NGOs' material support in their schools' efforts to promote school safety. This was attributed to the concentration of NGO efforts in the semi-arid areas of Mbeere, leaving out the other sub-counties.

The study sought to establish the extent of collaboration with partners by Boards of Management and how the same related to the schools' compliance with the safety standards. The relationship between collaboration with partners by Boards of Management and schools' compliance with the safety standards

is as presented in Table 3 below

Table 3: Relationship between collaboration with partners and compliance with safety standards

		Collaboration with partners for safety	Compliance with safety standards
Collaboration with partners for safety	Pearson Correlation	1	.726
Collaboration with partners for safety	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025
Collaboration with partners for safety	N	10	10
Compliance with safety standards	Pearson Correlation	.726	1
Compliance with safety standards	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
Compliance with safety standards	N	10	10

r = .726 p = .025< .05

Table 3 shows r = .726. This shows a strong positive correlation between collaboration with partners and compliance with safety standards in public boarding secondary schools. The positive linear relationship implies that with an increase in the schools' level of collaboration with partners, there is an improvement in schools' levels of compliance with the set safety standards.

The study further sought to test the following hypothesis: "There is no significant relationship between collaboration with partners by Boards of Management and compliance with safety standards in public boarding secondary schools"

Table 3 shows a p-value of .025, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming a significant relationship between collaboration with partners and compliance with safety standards in public boarding secondary schools. It can thus be inferred that collaboration with partners by boards of management significantly influences school compliance with safety standards.

4.2 Results from open-ended questions

Further, the study sought to establish how the schools partnered with safety agencies to ensure safety in the schools. The results revealed that the local health facilities helped in handling sick students, trained health club teachers on health and hygiene, and administered COVID-19 vaccination. The school dispensaries served as an extension of the county hospital in that, in the majority of schools with clinics, MoH seconded a nurse to the school, or there was a memorandum of understanding between the schools and the local public health facilities, where a clinician was scheduled to visit the school during designated days of the week to serve the students, as confirmed by SCQASOs.

Additionally, safety agencies like the Red Cross Society, the Scouts Movement and MoH have helped in the establishment of clubs: Red Cross Clubs, Health Clubs, Scouts and Girl Guides, through which promotion of health and safety could be achieved at the school level. For instance, the Red Cross,

through the school Red Cross clubs, has conducted safety drills, while the health clubs are vocal on school and personal cleanliness and hygiene. This was confirmed by a SCQASO who stated that,

Students are gaining safety skills through the established clubs as a measure to ensure that the students oversee their safety while at school. Schools also partner with the local police who come in to support in extreme cases of safety breaches or threats, such as student unrest and rampant abuse of drugs and other substances, by conducting deterrent patrols. The uniformed men also aid in investigations in cases of reported crimes like theft.

It is also notable from the findings that schools are working with officers commanding local police stations (OCSs) to fight the entry of drugs and substances, and weapons into schools using sniffer dogs, as highlighted by one of the BoM secretaries while responding to an interview;

Keeping close contact with the police has helped schools tame school unrest, as the frequent sight of the uniformed and armed officers on school premises and students' awareness of the partnership between them and the school management is itself a deterrent to any form of student indiscipline.

Furthermore, according to the respondents, some school boards have resorted to contracting security firms to manage security in the schools. This was confirmed by a board member who noted that, "Our school engage security firms through competitive tendering by registered companies to provide trained guards, while another one posted that, "We advertise the posts and interview prospective guards to ensure that we get the best based on merit."

This explained the presence of youthful, strong, uniformed and trained guards in some schools rather than engaging the old, who could not really engage the students due to language barriers and advanced age, as previously done by many schools as brought out by one SCQASO who, upon probing to describe the security personnel in boarding secondary during an interview, stated that;

"In many schools, the security personnel are aged, and this compromises their concentration as they execute their duties."

This was echoed by some board members who reported that they sourced watchmen from the host community or got referrals from the local community, while others confessed to getting guards from far lands, especially from the Maa-speaking communities. These guards were not necessarily trained and thus less costly. This, however, turned to cost the schools their safety, as the "askaris" were easily compromised by students whom the majority could not control.

Partnering with security firms to provide guards has gone a long way in improving student behaviours and safety in general. This was confirmed by one of the SCQASOs who indicated that

The security personnel in schools are playing a vital role in ensuring school safety by: gatekeeping during the day and night, verifying and taking visitors' details, managing clocking in and out of school by staff and students, manning CCTV cameras at night to ensure that sensitive areas are covered and, alerting the school administration and teachers in case of threat or safety lapse.

It was also reported by members of the board that security men and women from the firms had acquired some level of training, and since the qualification for the engagement was a Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) certificate, the majority got along well and easily with the students, as there was easy communication and thus understanding between the two groups. This minimised cases of misunderstanding and conflict between them, which could otherwise threaten school safety. Moreover, the guards' level of education earned them respect from the learners, the majority of whom did not wish to cross the guards' paths for fear of the repercussions.

4.3 Barriers to school safety

The researcher sought to establish the challenges experienced in making schools safe. The research findings indicated inadequate physical facilities to accommodate the high student population. The board members confirmed that available facilities were congested, and they feared this had led to the spread of social ills like lesbianism and gayism, theft and mass indiscipline as offenders hide behind the crowds.

The respondents also noted that an unresponsive, uncooperative and sometimes ignorant community hindered progress in securing the schools for safety. This was confirmed by board members who reported that they were faced with non-cooperation from some community members, including students who lacked seriousness in uptake of recommended safety guidelines.

Further, general insecurity in some schools' localities infiltrated into schools, challenging the managements' efforts to promote school safety. According to board members, this was made worse by rugged terrain which delayed support from the security organs when schools made a distress call.

It was also reported that a lack of control over the flow of information from the rest of the country, when other schools are burning or experiencing unrest, and protests become a motivation for students to do the same; the copycat syndrome. Power blackouts and outages were at times blamed for the school fires.

Finally, inadequate funds, hence the inability to procure adequate safety equipment (fire extinguishers and first Aid kits), installation of adequate hand wash points, erecting of perimeter walls to secure the schools' compounds, as well as putting up required physical infrastructure, was a major setback. The board members confirmed that financing of priority areas: feeding, academic programmes, personal emoluments and infrastructural development left little or no funds for other school programmes, including safety.

4.4 Measures recommended to enhance school safety

The study sought to establish from the respondents the measures they could recommend to be undertaken by the boards of management in a bid to enhance school safety.

Board members called for more financing and improved financing strategies to ensure that schools received adequate and timely funding from the government to allow implementation of safety programmes and activities.

The respondents were also of the feeling that there should be increased safety training and capacity building of teachers and all other stakeholders (drills, guidance and counselling). The respondents also recommended that school boards ensure more safety talks are conducted at the school level to create awareness among the stakeholders.

There was also a felt need to install CCTV to aid in timely surveillance and on-the-spot handling of safety threats. There was also a recommendation that schools with CCTVs to allow the watchmen and teachers on duty to survey happenings in the school by creating stations for them. The respondents lamented that in most of the schools, only the principal was connected, meaning that in his absence, no one could take prompt action when required to address a safety-threatening situation in the school.

Some board members recommended that the MoH should help in the management of school students' health and safety by establishing clinics and providing qualified registered personnel and medicine within the schools. Board members also recommended that schools should step up referrals for drug tests and counselling for learners on drugs, and counselling learners with aggressive behaviours by making use of public health facilities within reach.

The Ministry of Education, through the SCQASOs, was also expected to enforce the safety guidelines and

recommended measures, as many school boards either remained ignorant of them or faced resource challenges; safety was not given the weight it deserves.

On their part, the SCQASOs called for parents' engagement by BoMs in putting up adequate physical facilities to aid in minimising congestion in classrooms and dormitories and cultivating a friendly environment to ensure that schools become a home away from home for the school populace. The use of parents, discipline committees, guidance and counselling, and the administration of manual punishment where necessary to avoid the prohibited corporal punishment were recommended as alternative ways of discipline that ensured the safety of the learner while minimising conflict between the students and the school management.

The county government was called upon to ensure that all schools were supplied with adequate clean water, while local political leaders were called upon to avail resources like CDF and LATIFF to develop infrastructure in schools. It was also felt that recognition and motivation of schools that exclusively complied with the safety standards through rewards would entice others to follow.

Table 4: Observations made.

ITEM	YES Freq %	NO Freq %	Partially Freq %
School is fenced	45 81.8	10 18.2	0 0
The school has a gate	55 100	0 0	0 0
The school gate is manned	47 85.5	8 14.5	0 0
There is a uniformed school guard	39 70.9	16 29.1	0 0
School grounds are levelled	37 67.3	18 32.7	0 0
All walkways are clearly demarcated with flowers/shrubs	36 65.5	15 27.3	4 7.2
The suggestion box is strategically placed for ease of use.	48 87.3	6 10.9	1 1.8
Playgrounds are marked for various sporting activities	34 61.8	21 38.2	0 0
There is a visitor register at the gate	51 92.7	4 7.3	0 0
Staircases are adequate and on each end of storeyed buildings	27 49.1	16 29.1	12 21.8
Doors adequate and opening outwards	48 87.3	7 12.7	0 0
Serviced fire extinguishers strategically fitted	45 81.8	10 18.2	0 0
Windows are without grills and are easy to open	48 87.3	4 7.3	3 5.4
Boarding area is secure	50 90.9	5 9.1	0 0
There are staff houses for the principal, the deputy and other staff	33 60.0	2 3.6	20 36.4
There is a register of stakeholders' contacts	45 81.8	10 18.2	0 0
The school has a functional sanatorium	32 58.2	23 41.8	0 0

School facilities are accessible to learners with special needs	40 72.7	15 27.3	0 0
School facilities are clean	50 90.9	5 9.1	0 0
There are hand-washing points with soap outside the toilets	45 81.8	10 18.2	0 0

The observations show that schools have not fully complied with safety standards and recommended guidelines because of the cited challenges. There is a need for school boards to reach out to organisations, agencies, philanthropists, the political class and alumni for support in the form of finances and material resources that can aid schools in achieving safety goals and implementing safety programmes.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the conclusions made from the study findings. The recommendations made based on the findings and suggestions for further research are also included.

5.1 Conclusion

The study established that there was a strong positive correlation between Boards of Management collaborating with partners and compliance with safety standards.

Collaboration with stakeholders significantly influenced compliance with safety standards. The strategy was fairly implemented by schools, with a mean score of 3.94.

The study further concluded that boards of boarding secondary schools in Embu substantially worked with various partners: sponsors, MoH and county governments to enhance school safety.

Furthermore, based on the findings, the study concluded that boarding secondary schools in Embu County were yet to fully comply with the safety standards as spelt out in the Safety Standards Manual for Schools in Kenya (2008).

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Recommendations of the study

The study recommends that school safety is a shared responsibility requiring active collaboration among all relevant stakeholders. School boards of management and the administrations should establish and strengthen partnerships among key stakeholders, while ensuring long-term collaboration strategies rather than relying on occasional stakeholder involvement. This can be achieved through regular engagement, clearly defined responsibilities for each stakeholder, clear accountability structures, shared decision-making, and continuous monitoring and evaluation through safety audits and stakeholder feedback meetings. This will help to assess the effectiveness and sustainability of the collaborative interventions.

Boards of Management should collaborate with government agencies, including the Ministry of Education at the local level, to get regular stakeholder training and capacity building on school safety, emergency preparedness, conflict resolution, child protection, disaster management, and psychosocial support, while ensuring that the placement of students is informed by the schools' capacities for tuition and boarding to avoid congestion.

The Boards of Management should strengthen collaboration and partnerships with safety and security

agencies: local police services, community policing structures, health facilities, local government authorities, and non-governmental organisations to address different dimensions of school safety, to enhance security awareness, prevent crime, manage emergencies, and respond effectively to security threats within and around school environments.

Boards of Management should work to collaboratively mobilise resources in the form of financial and material resources, expertise, and support for the effective implementation of school safety programmes. The Ministry of Education should be encouraged to include a safety vote head in school funds to ensure availability of safety resources for implementation of safety programmes in all schools

Boards of Management should develop, review, and implement clear school safety policies and guidelines in consultation with relevant stakeholders while adhering to the Ministry of Education safety guidelines. These policies should outline the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders and provide procedures for reporting, preventing, and responding to safety incidents in the school.

5.2.2 Recommendations for further research

To investigate the barriers to effective collaboration among stakeholders in promoting safety in secondary schools.

To investigate the causes of the rampant school unrest in the county

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