

Board Independence and Educational Performance in Catholic Founded Grant Aided Secondary Schools in Uganda

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Abstract

The study investigated how the Board Independence affects the educational performance of Catholic-founded Grant-Aided Secondary Schools (GASS) in Uganda. Drawing from agency, stakeholder, and stewardship theories, the study underscores the importance of a strong governance and management system based on professional practices to improve educational outcomes. A case study was used employing a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both the quantitative and qualitative approaches of data collection and analysis. A sample of 67 schools was selected out of 81 using Krejcie & Morgan's table. From each school, two staff members were selected (headteacher and director of studies) and two board members (chairman of the board and one other chair of a committee). The study revealed that while boards exhibit autonomy in agenda-setting and policy generation, challenges remain in maintaining objective decision-making and inclusive stakeholder engagement. The findings identify a complex dynamic between operational independence and institutional relationships, especially with religious foundation bodies. Statistical and multivariate analyses show that board independence is a multifaceted construct, encompassing synergies and tensions across governance aspects. The study concludes that reforms should focus on strengthening objective decision-making, balancing institutional ties with strategic autonomy, and enhancing stakeholder involvement. Recommendations include evidence-based decision-making, board training, communication infrastructure, conflict-of-interest management, and structured performance evaluations to promote effective and inclusive governance in Catholic-founded GASS in Uganda.

Keywords

Board Independence, Educational Performance, Grant Aided Secondary

Schools

1. Introduction

Governance is regarded as a *sine qua non* in educational performance. This research intends to find out how the Board of Governors (BoG) perspective affects the educational success of Catholic-founded Grant Aided Secondary Schools (GASS) in Uganda. A strong governance and management system of educational institutions based on professional management practices is crucial for all countries. Governance must be present to be effective (Mabula & Mkulu, 2022; Ombati, 2019; Sang & Sang, 2011). This will eventually improve educational performance.

An effective governance and management system is required for national education systems (Department of Education, 2017; Sang & Sang, 2011). To guarantee improvement in teaching and learning, the BoGs' role is paramount to schools (OECD, 2020; UNESCO, 2015). BoGs significantly contribute to the management of schools, and this should not be viewed as a one-off but rather an ongoing process. The areas include but not limited to; academic performance, infrastructural development, music and dance and sports. The BOG has the authority to guarantee effective and efficient school governance. As a result, it has a responsibility to uphold the interests of the school and guarantee that learners have the best learning opportunities possible.

Therefore, the BoG is mandated to monitor overall school performance, plan for infrastructural development and learning materials, and look for resources such as grants, donations, bursaries, and budget approval, among other things (Bakundana, 2017; Wangtho, 2007). The BoG develops the school community, coordinates with parents, ensures proper financial management, provides practical guidance, and a conducive training and a good working environment within the school. All of the above are intended to promote a conducive learning environment that enables improved educational performance. However, there is a need to increase efficiency and accountability by reducing unnecessary protocols (Wataba & Abiodun, 2018). Adeyemo (2021) argues that such a move will ensure educational quality and relevant improvement.

1.1. Historical Background

The concept of Boards of Governors (BoGs) dates back to the Brotherhood of Mercy (Misericordia) founded in Florence, Italy, over 700 years ago, comprising clergy, nobility, elites, and the working class. In the USA, BoGs began in 1647 with Puritans in Massachusetts Bay Colony, evolving into distinct school committees by 1826. These boards were tasked with formulating school policies and ensuring their enforcement. With growing urbanization, governance shifted from direct democracy to structured boards due to efficiency needs.

Although the U.S. Constitution excludes education, federal oversight since the

1960s has influenced schools through legislation like the [Civil Rights Act \(1964\)](#) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ([Department of Education, 2017](#)).

In the UK (England, Wales, Northern Ireland), every school must have a governing body to define its vision, standards, and oversee finances. Governors are typically volunteers reimbursed for expenses. Legislation mandates parent, staff, community, and foundation representatives on boards, serving four-year terms ([Employment Rights Act, 1996](#)).

In India, the 1860 Societies Registration Act mandated BoGs for state-funded and autonomous institutions, responsible for overseeing administration and policy implementation. Boards meet 3 - 4 times a year and supervise staff recruitment and academic activities ([Irungu & Nyagah, 2013](#)).

South Africa's 1996 Schools Act mandates governing boards of parents and educators to support headteachers and improve school resources ([Carrim, 2001](#)). In Nigeria, BoGs were introduced in 1967 to manage former mission schools. Their role has since expanded to include appointing competent school heads ([Adesina & Ogunasju, 1984](#)).

Kenya adopted BoGs after independence, guided by the [Ominde Report \(1964\)](#). [The Education Act \(2005\)](#) mandates BoGs to manage resources and infrastructure, with principals and boards appointed by the Minister of Education. Despite defined roles, Kenya lacks a standardized performance evaluation system ([Mbii, Magoma & Waweru, 2020](#)).

In Uganda, Grant-Aided Secondary Schools (GASS) are governed by BoGs as stipulated in [The Education Act \(2008\)](#). These boards consist of nine members representing foundation bodies, teachers, parents, alumni, and local councils.

Globally, BoGs are evolving to incorporate diverse stakeholders in school management ([Bebchuk & Roe, 1999](#)). While this trend seeks to enhance educational performance, challenges and opportunities especially in Uganda necessitate further exploration to improve governance effectiveness.

1.2. Contextual Perspective

Boards of Governors (BoGs) have gained prominence in Uganda's educational governance, though clear evidence of their effectiveness remains scarce ([PSCGT, 2000](#); [Twinomugisha & Kabandize, 2022](#)). Strengthening legislative and regulatory frameworks is essential for ensuring accountability and efficient school management ([Mugambwa et al., 2018](#)). Historically, Uganda's schools were owned by religious bodies and private groups, with the government providing funding and oversight. However, religious segregation hindered national unity efforts. In 1940, the British-formed Thomas Education Committee recommended BoGs for secondary schools, leading to the 1963 Education Act which formalized foundation bodies' involvement in school leadership, though challenges like oversight gaps and conflicts of interest persiste ([Ssekamwa, 2001](#)).

The 1992 Government White Paper introduced market-driven reforms, resulting in the 2008 Education Act that redefined governance in Grant-Aided Second-

ary Schools (GASS). BoGs, composed of stakeholders from foundation bodies, teachers, parents, alumni, and local councils, oversee school management, assets, finances, discipline, fee structures, and stakeholder engagement (*The Education Act, 2008*; *Tumwine, 2021*). BoGs play a key role in promoting transparency, accountability, and effective leadership, working with school administrations to enhance educational quality, aligning with Uganda's Vision 2040 and Sustainable Development Goals (*Ssenkumba & Kyagaba, 2022*).

The Education Service Commission appoints headteachers who align with the founding bodies' values (*The Education Act, 2008*). Unlike corporate boards based on the Cadbury model, Ugandan BoGs operate voluntarily, focusing on collaborative leadership and educational outcomes (*Nabwire, 2023*). The government supports Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, and Muslim-founded schools with subsidies for salaries, infrastructure, and learning materials, while BoGs are responsible for ensuring prudent financial management, student retention, and academic performance.

1.3. Theoretical Perspective

1.3.1. Agency Theory

This study is grounded in Agency Theory, which explains governance through the relationship between principals (owners) and agents (managers). In schools, Boards of Governors (BoGs) act as autonomous regulators, ensuring administrators uphold accountability and align actions with institutional goals (*Jensen & Meckling, 1976*; *Pitkin, 2012*). Agency tools like oversight and incentives reduce managerial misconduct and enhance value creation. The theory supports governance structures that separate strategic roles (BoGs) from operational execution (headteachers), ensuring transparency and reducing self-interest conflicts (*Eisenhardt, 2020*; *Simons et al., 2023*). However, Agency Theory is critiqued for overestimating board independence and simplifying complex governance dynamics in educational institutions (*Brudney, 1985*). Despite its limitations, it remains foundational in justifying formal accountability frameworks for BoGs in school governance.

1.3.2. Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory focuses on balancing institutional goals with the interests of all stakeholders, including parents, students, teachers, and communities (*Freeman et al., 2004*; *Blair, 1995*). It broadens BoG responsibilities by encouraging participatory decision-making and fostering trust and legitimacy through stakeholder engagement (*Harrison et al., 2019*). In schools, this theory emphasizes inclusive governance, ensuring that diverse voices shape policies and practices. However, identifying and managing diverse stakeholder demands can be challenging, particularly in complex school environments with multiple actors (*Nyongesa & Otiende, 2017*). Boards must carefully negotiate these interests to avoid marginalizing key contributors, ensuring governance remains responsive yet effective.

1.3.3. Stewardship Theory

Stewardship Theory posits that managers are inherently motivated to act in the best interest of the organization, driven by values like trust, loyalty, and long-term commitment (Davis et al., 1997). In schools, BoGs and headteachers should collaborate towards shared goals such as academic excellence and financial sustainability. Stewardship encourages decentralized leadership, fostering a culture of cooperation and shared vision, which is vital in nonprofit and educational settings (Segal & Lehrer, 2023; Aluko & Kazeem, 2025). Unlike Agency Theory, stewardship assumes managers are trustworthy stewards rather than opportunistic agents. However, misuse of authority and poor decision-making remain risks, indicating that stewardship requires a foundation of mutual accountability and oversight to be effective.

1.4. Problem Statement

The Education Act of 2008 mandates that every Grant-Aided Secondary School (GASS) in Uganda have a competent Board of Governors (BoG) to oversee school administration, property, finances, and student and staff welfare. Despite this, there are governance gaps, as many BoGs lack clear metrics to assess their effectiveness in improving educational outcomes. Studies indicate that BoG members often lack management skills, are disengaged, and fail to adequately represent stakeholders (Wataba & Abiudun, 2018). Consequently, many GASS schools continue to experience low enrolment, poor academic performance, and high dropout rates (Annual Reports of Diocesan Education Secretaries, 2017-2022).

Research further shows that lack of independence negatively impact school performance (Bolton, 2016; Curry et al., 2018). While governance strengthening initiatives like board trainings have been introduced, disparities persist across dioceses. Dioceses such as Arua, Gulu, and Tororo still struggle with poor educational outcomes, while Kampala and Mbarara have shown notable improvements. These inconsistencies highlight the need to investigate how BoG independence influence educational performance in Catholic-founded GASS, with the aim of informing governance reforms to enhance learning outcomes.

1.5. Objective of the Study

To establish the influence of board independence on the educational performance of Catholic founded Grant Aided Secondary Schools in Uganda.

2. Literature Review

The chapter reviewed the theories and academic literature on BoG's outlook with its possible influence on GASS's school performance in order to familiarize with what has been done to frame current study. Further, empirical studies and the findings in this area will be highlighted in regard to the objectives of the study. The knowledge deficit in the field of research will then be determined in the conclusion.

Board Independence

Board independence is a key indicator of effective governance, offering checks and balances to safeguard stakeholder interests. Agency Theory posits that independent directors enhance transparency, accountability, and sustainability by monitoring management behavior (Ibrahim & Angelis, 1995; Akpan & Amran, 2014). Boards with a higher number of non-executive members are more likely to effectively oversee management, ensuring decisions align with organizational objectives. Studies show that board independence correlates with improved governance, sustainability, and institutional accountability (Fernando et al., 2019; García-Sánchez et al., 2021). In schools, BoG independence positively influences planning and supervisory roles, though its control role shows a weaker correlation (Wataba & Nafiu, 2018).

Stakeholder Theory emphasizes that independent boards respond to social expectations, promoting transparency and long-term stakeholder engagement (Ibrahim & Angelidis, 1995; Lee & Chen, 2022). Independent directors are more attuned to environmental and social concerns, fostering sustainable development initiatives in both corporate and educational settings (Almatrooshi & Singh, 2023). Balanced boards with both internal and external directors are more effective in curbing managerial self-interest and aligning school governance with community needs (Bhagat & Black, 2001; Dionne et al., 2023).

While many studies affirm the positive impact of board independence on governance and accountability (Jizi, 2017), others challenge its direct link to profitability and institutional performance. Wah et al. (2015) found no significant correlation between board independence and financial success. Ibrahim et al. (2003) argue that independent directors may struggle to oversee complex organizations, highlighting that board size, financial expertise, and diligence often have a greater impact on performance than independence alone (Hayes et al., 2004).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

A case study design was adopted to explore the Board of Governors' (BoG) outlook and educational performance in Catholic-founded government-aided secondary schools (GASS). A convergent parallel mixed-methods approach was used to address the limitations of single-method designs and offer deeper insights (Creswell, 2012; Caruth, 2013). Qualitative methods enabled detailed participant experiences, while quantitative methods supported data generalization and hypothesis testing.

3.2. Research Instruments

3.2.1. Questionnaire

Questionnaires were distributed to Directors of Studies and Headteachers. This method was chosen for its ease of analysis, cost-effectiveness, time efficiency, con-

fidentiality, and ability to gather data from large samples (Creswell, 2014; Elepu et al., 2023; Guthrie, 2010). A closed-ended, self-administered questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was used to collect quantitative data.

3.2.2. Interview

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with BoG chairpersons and one other committee head. These semi-structured interviews sought deeper insights into the BoG's influence on school performance and covered topics such as board composition, independence, and role duality (Amin, 2005; Elepu et al., 2023). Follow-up questions ensured clarity and depth.

3.2.3. Documentary Review

Documentary review was used to gather secondary data on BoG outlook and school performance by examining GASS documents like management reports, board minutes, policy files, and other relevant records (Creswell, 2014). The review focused on board qualifications, appointments, inductions, roles, relationships, and delegation of authority (Guthrie, 2010).

Additionally, UNEB UCE results (2019-2023) were analyzed for academic performance, while MoES enrolment reports were used to assess student enrolment and completion rates.

The collected data was cleaned and analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation. Pearson's correlation and regression analysis were applied to examine the relationship between board independence and educational performance. Qualitative data was analyzed through content analysis.

3.3. Sample Size, Selection, and Sampling Techniques

A sample of 67 schools was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970) table to ensure statistical representativeness. Schools were selected through simple random sampling to maintain proportional representation of the larger school population in the two regions (Fleetwood, 2022).

The BoG chairperson and one BoG committee head were selected purposively as external managers responsible for advisory and strategic oversight (Sekeran, 2003). Headteachers were also purposively selected due to their role in daily school operations, which directly impacts educational performance. Directors of Studies, who oversee student enrolment and academic operations, were selected for their expertise. For qualitative data, respondents were chosen based on their experience and subject-matter knowledge.

3.3.1. Simple Random Sampling

Simple random sampling ensured equal selection probability, balanced known and unknown variables, and enhanced population representation (Creswell, 2012; Shagofah et al., 2022; Stockemer et al., 2019). Since the population of Catholic-founded GASS in Gulu and Tororo Archdioceses is homogeneous, every school had an equal chance of selection. This method was applied to headteachers and

deputy headteachers for unbiased representation (Amin, 2005).

3.3.2. Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling targeted respondents with specialized knowledge and experience relevant to the BoG outlook and educational performance (Guarte & Barrios, 2006; Neetij & Bikash, 2016). It was used to select BoG chairpersons, committee heads, and Directors of Studies, as their positions provide them with exclusive insights into the study problem (Creswell, 2014).

1) Reliability of Quantitative Data

Questionnaires were pre-tested through a pilot study in regions outside the study area to assess dependability and internal consistency. This helped identify potential response issues. Content validity was ensured by consulting experts, reviewing item wording, and incorporating feedback (Newman, 2007). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.7 or higher was considered acceptable for reliability.

2) Validity of Quantitative Data

Content validity was emphasized to ensure questions fairly represented the study constructs (Creswell, 2005). The Content Validity Index (CVI) was used, calculated as

$$CVI = \frac{\text{Number of approved questions}}{\text{Total number of questions}}$$

where n is the number of relevant items rated by supervisors and N is the total number of items. A CVI of 0.7 and above indicated acceptable validity (Zamanzadeh et al., 2015).

3) Validity and Reliability of Qualitative Data

To enhance credibility, transferability, confirmability, dependability, and triangulation, various validation techniques were applied (Maxwell, 2010).

Credibility

Extended interview engagement helped identify inconsistencies and negative cases, which were documented and clarified (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2010). Findings were also verified with participants to ensure accuracy.

Confirmability

The researcher minimized bias by using open-ended questions, active listening, transparent reporting, audit trails, and peer debriefing, avoiding personal influence on participants' responses (Coleman, 2021; Shenton, 2004).

Dependability

Consistency was maintained by documenting the data collection process, using multiple data sources, and conducting member checking. Member checking involved real-time clarification during interviews and post-interview feedback sessions with participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Coleman, 2021).

Triangulation

Reliability was strengthened through triangulation using document analysis and interviews. Content and thematic analysis helped identify convergence patterns, enhancing analytical depth (Scott, 2007).

Transferability

Detailed contextual descriptions were provided to ensure findings could be applied in similar settings. Data from interviews and document reviews, along with peer debriefing, enhanced transferability by ensuring relevance and clarity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Coleman, 2021)

3.4. Limitations

This study focused only on Catholic-founded GASS schools in Tororo and Gulu Archdioceses, limiting the generalizability of findings to other regions and school types. The experiences observed may not reflect schools with different backgrounds or management structures. Broader research is needed to capture nationwide diversity.

The small sample size of 65 schools also limits representativeness, as it may not reflect the full range of school characteristics and experiences. Future studies should include a larger, more diverse sample for broader applicability.

Potential data collection bias was addressed through random sampling, rigorous data review, maintaining respondent anonymity, and triangulation of multiple data sources to enhance accuracy and credibility.

4. Presentation of Findings

4.1. Board Independence

This section examines board independence in school governance through head teachers' perceptions, analyzing various dimensions of board autonomy and decision-making processes. Using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), head teachers evaluated seven key aspects of board independence and autonomy.

4.1.1. Descriptive Analysis

The findings in **Table 1** reveal varying perceptions regarding board independence, with an overall moderate average rating of 2.34. The highest perceived aspect of independence relates to boards setting their own agenda and priorities (3.40), suggesting that head teachers recognize some level of autonomous planning within board operations. This is followed by perceptions about board members' having no material relationships with grant-aided secondary schools (2.71) and their ability to act without undue influence from foundation bodies or government (2.38).

However, head teachers expressed lower confidence in certain critical areas of board independence. The lowest rating was assigned to the board's objective decision-making (1.72), followed by committee members' independent decision-making (1.86). This suggests a perceived challenge in maintaining objectivity and independence in crucial decision-making processes. The perception that boards listen to different stakeholders' views also received a relatively low rating (2.03), indicating potential concerns about inclusive governance.

The distribution of responses shows interesting patterns, with most items re-

ceiving mixed evaluations. For instance, while 66.2% agreed that boards arrive at decisions objectively, this contrasts with the overall low mean score, suggesting that the strength of disagreement from other respondents significantly impacted the final assessment. The data indicates a complex dynamic between formal board independence and perceived operational autonomy, with head teachers recognizing varying degrees of independence across different aspects of board functioning. The findings suggest potential areas for improvement in strengthening board independence, particularly in decision-making processes and stakeholder engagement.

Table 1. Perception of head teachers and DoS on independence or autonomy of the board.

	Agree		Disagree		Not sure		Strongly Agree		Strongly Disagree		Mean	σ	Performance Decision	Ranking
	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%				
Board members act without undue influence of the Foundation body/Government	25	38.5%	15	23.1%	9	13.8%	7	10.8%	9	13.8%	2.38	1.444	High Perception	3
The board arrives at decisions objectively	43	66.2%	2	3.1%	0	0	15	23.1%	5	7.7%	1.72	1.068	Low Decision	
The board listens to the views of the different stakeholders	40	61.5%	5	7.7%	1	1.5%	16	24.6%	3	4.6%	2.03	1.436	Low Decision	
Board members of grant-aided secondary schools do not have any material relationship with grant-aided secondary schools	17	26.2%	12	18.5%	15	23.1%	15	23.1%	6	9.2%	2.71	1.331	High Perception	2
The committee members make independent decisions	39	60.0%	11	16.9%	1	1.5%	13	20.0%	1	1.5%	1.86	1.248	Low Decision	
Board members set their own agenda and priorities	23	35.4%	17	26.2%	4	6.2%	18	27.7%	3	4.6%	3.40	1.344	High Perception	1
Board generates independent policies to govern the school	31	47.7%	11	16.9%	3	4.6%	14	21.5%	6	9.2%	2.28	1.474	Low Decision	
Average											2.34			

Source: Survey August-November 2024.

4.1.2. Statistical Analysis

1) Univariate Analysis

Chi-square tests χ^2 (Table 2) employed analyze head teachers' perceptions of board independence across seven key dimensions of governance, utilizing a significance level of 0.05. The results reveal significant patterns in how head teachers view various aspects of board autonomy and decision-making processes.

The analysis demonstrates statistically significant unequal distributions in six (6) of the seven (7) examined aspects of board independence ($p < 0.05$). These

include the board's freedom from foundation body or government influence ($p = 0.002$), objective decision-making processes ($p < 0.001$), responsiveness to stakeholder views ($p < 0.001$), committee independence in decision-making ($p < 0.001$), autonomy in agenda setting ($p < 0.001$), and independence in policy generation ($p < 0.001$). The rejection of the null hypothesis in these cases indicates that head teachers hold distinct and non-random views about these aspects of board functioning.

Notably, only one dimension showed a different pattern: the question of board members' having no material relationships with grant-aided secondary schools ($p = 0.223$). In this case, the null hypothesis was retained, suggesting that head teachers' views were more evenly distributed across the response categories. This finding indicates less consensus among respondents regarding the nature and impact of board members' material connections to schools.

These statistical findings have important implications for understanding board governance in educational institutions. The clear patterns in most areas suggest that head teachers have well-formed opinions about board independence, particularly regarding decision-making processes and governance structures. However, the less definitive result concerning having no material relationships points to a more complex aspect of board independence that might benefit from further investigation. These insights could be valuable for educational policy-makers and administrators working to enhance board effectiveness and governance structures in schools.

Table 2. Univariate analysis of head teachers perceptions on board of governance independence.

Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The categories of Board members act without undue influence of the Foundation body/Government occur with equal probabilities.	One-Sample Chi-Square Test	0.002	Reject the null hypothesis.
2	The categories of The board arrives at decisions objectively occur with equal probabilities.	One-Sample Chi-Square Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
3	The categories of The board listens to the views of the different stakeholders occur with equal probabilities.	One-Sample Chi-Square Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
4	The categories of Board members of grant-aided secondary schools do not have any material relationship with grant-aided secondary schools occur with equal probabilities.	One-Sample Chi-Square Test	0.223	Retain the null hypothesis.
5	The categories of The committee members make independent decisions occur with equal probabilities.	One-Sample Chi-Square Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Continued

6	The categories of Board members set their own agenda and priorities occur with equal probabilities.	One-Sample Chi-Square Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
7	The categories of Board generates independent policies to govern the school occur with equal probabilities.	One-Sample Chi-Square Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is 0.050.

Source: Survey August-November 2024.

2) Multivariate Analysis

Based on head teachers' responses, a Principal Component Analysis **Table 3**, was conducted to understand their perceptions of board independence in school governance. The analysis revealed three distinct components that explain how school leaders view the interrelation of different aspects of board functioning.

Head teachers' perceptions strongly cluster around a primary component of core decision-making independence. They view strong connections (correlations above 0.8) between the board's ability to make objective decisions, listen to stakeholders, operate without foundation/government influence, and maintain committee independence in decision-making. School leaders also perceive moderate relationships between these aspects and the board's ability to set agendas and generate policies (correlations above 0.5). This suggests that head teachers see these elements as fundamentally interconnected in establishing genuine board independence.

In the second component, head teachers perceive a distinct relationship between policy-making authority and institutional connections. Their responses indicate strong associations between board policy generation (0.668) and material relationships with schools (0.606), while noting a negative relationship with stakeholder involvement (-0.342). This perception pattern suggests that school leaders recognize a potential tension between the board's policy-making autonomy and its engagement with stakeholders.

The third component reveals head teachers' perceptions of a complex dynamic between operational independence and institutional relationships. They observe a strong positive association with material relationships to schools (0.720) but a notable negative correlation with agenda-setting autonomy (-0.545). This indicates that school leaders perceive a potential trade-off between maintaining close institutional ties and preserving independent agenda-setting capabilities.

These findings, based on head teachers' perspectives, suggest that board independence is perceived as a multifaceted construct. School leaders' responses indicate that while certain aspects of board independence naturally cluster together, there are also inherent tensions between institutional relationships and autonomous governance. This understanding provides valuable insights for enhancing board effectiveness in educational institutions while acknowledging the complex

realities observed by school leaders.

Table 3. Multivariate analysis of head teachers Perceptions on Board of Governance Independence.

	Component Matrix ^a		
	Component		
	1	2	3
Board members act without undue influence of the Foundation body/Government	0.822	-0.108	-0.140
The board arrives at decisions objectively	0.851	-0.251	0.178
The board listens to the views of the different stakeholders	0.828	-0.342	0.081
Board members of grant-aided secondary schools do not have any material relationship with grant-aided secondary schools	0.250	0.606	0.720
The committee members make independent decisions	0.806	-0.176	0.262
Board members set their own agenda and priorities	0.663	0.314	-0.545
Board generates independent policies to govern the school	0.550	0.668	-0.243

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a. 3 components extracted.

Source: Survey August-November 2024.

3) Synthesis and Implications

The analyses collectively reveal board independence as a complex construct. While head teachers perceive strong independence in agenda-setting and operational matters, they identify challenges in maintaining objective decision-making processes. The statistical analyses confirm these patterns are not random, suggesting systematic variations in board independence across different governance aspects. The factor analysis further demonstrates how these elements cluster into distinct dimensions of board functioning, highlighting both synergies and tensions in governance autonomy.

The findings indicate a clear need to strengthen objective decision-making processes within school boards. Additionally, there is an evident requirement for better balancing institutional relationships with operational independence. The analysis also suggests the importance of enhancing stakeholder engagement while maintaining board autonomy in decision-making processes.

This comprehensive analysis provides valuable insights for educational policy-makers and administrators to develop more effective board governance structures while acknowledging the complex realities of school leadership.

5. Discussions, Conclusion and Recommendation

Board Independence

The analysis revealed three distinct components that explain how school leaders view the interrelation of different aspects of board functioning.

Autonomy and Decision Making

Head teachers' and DoS' perceptions strongly cluster around a primary component of core decision-making independence. They show strong correlations of above 0.8 between the board's ability to make objective decisions, listen to stakeholders, operate without foundation body influence /government influence, and maintain committee independence in decision-making. The strong inter-item correlations suggest that these components are not seen in isolation. Instead, they are perceived as interdependent elements that collectively uphold the integrity and functionality of the school board. The clustering of these perceptions into a single dominant component reinforces the idea that decision-making independence is not only foundational but also multi-dimensional.

The data reveal that both head teachers and Directors of Studies (DoS) perceive core decision-making independence as a primary, cohesive dimension of effective school governance. This result is significant because it highlights a shared belief in the necessity of autonomy and impartiality in the decision-making processes of school boards. KII-BoG-Tororo-Male-6

Board's ability to set Agenda and Generate Policies

School leaders also perceive moderate relationships between these aspects and the board's ability to set agendas and generate policies (correlations above 0.5). This suggests that head teachers and DoS see these elements as fundamentally interconnected in establishing genuine board independence. This finding suggests that, much as policy formulation and agenda setting are viewed as integral to the wider framework of board independence, they seem to understand these governance functions not as isolated administrative tasks, but as expressions of the autonomy of the board and strategic authority. When a board can determine its own priorities and develop responsive policies, it reinforces its capacity to act independently, free from external pressures. This is consistent with a respondent's view; "*What I have seen here in our board is that each committee present their resolutions which they had passed before the general board meeting, so we always have that room for every committee to present what they have resolved in their committee and when the members don't agree with some reports they are suspended.*" KII-BoG-Arua-Female-8. The finding indicates that the board is composed of various committees who are active participants in raising and discussing issues on the board. This decentralisation of power ensures inclusive participation, fosters transparency and representation. It is also evident that such mode of participation limits unfairness among board members, hence promoting board independence.

This finding is consistent with agency theory which states that the presence and autonomy of directors are designated to ensure that managers act in the best interest of the shareholders. It is also in line with stakeholder theory which strive to fulfill social expectations, which emphasizes the importance of strategic control as a defining feature of autonomous institutions, hence promoting independence of the board (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Freeman et al., 2004). This finding is also

aligned to literature which reflects a growing recognition in school leadership that independence is about having the procedural authority to shape school direction through internal deliberation and consensus.

Policy making Authority and Institutional connections

The headteachers and DoS perceive a distinct relationship between policy-making authority and institutional connections. Their responses indicate strong associations between board policy generation (0.668) and material relationships with schools (0.606), while noting a negative relationship with stakeholder involvement (-0.342). The strong positive associations between board policy generation ($r = 0.668$) and material connections with schools ($r = 0.606$) propose that the school board view making policy as closely tied to the board's embeddedness within the school through funding, ownership, or other tangible relationships. The study finding further reveal that the headteacher and DoS recognize a potential tension between the role of the board in policy-making autonomy and its interaction with stakeholders. This means that when boards maintain a strong operational link with the school, they are perceived as more empowered to formulate policies that help the school to grow. Such entrenched relations may offer boards with the contextual understanding and leverage needed to exercise meaningful governance authority of the school. This resonates well with the stewardship theory which focuses on responsible management and protection of the school.

However, the finding observed a negative correlation with stakeholder involvement ($r = -0.342$) which show a potential tension because when board members become more autonomous in policy generation with support from the foundation body, they might ignore the voices of the broader stakeholder in the decision-making process. This is supported by one respondent who raised concern on stakeholder involvement "*Parents are key stakeholders and any decision involving their children they should be involved for instance increase in school fees* KII-BoG-Gulu-Male-11. Parents are key stakeholders and contributes financially in running of the schools, making their involvement in decisions especially those related to school fees critical. Coupled to the above, the study finding echoes concerns raised in governance where strong institutional control can sometimes limit democratic engagement and transparency (Bray, 2001; Caldwell & Spinks, 2013). It also aligns with critiques of top-down policy approaches in education, which, while efficient, may marginalize voices of teachers, parents, and other community actors.

The third component reveals head teachers' perceptions of a complex dynamic between operational independence and institutional relationships. They observe a strong positive association with material relationships to schools (0.720). The strong positive correlation with material relationships to schools ($r = 0.720$) suggests that school boards perceived as having closer ties with the foundation body. This finding is in agreement with a participant noted that who noted that "*out of the 12 members of the BoG only one is a non-Catholic*" KII-BoG-Gulu-Male-11. This position is not very healthy with good governance practice in terms of au-

tonomy and independent decision making. This finding is aligned with existing literature. Bray (2001) noted that this is a larger governance dilemma in which institutional regulation can stifle autonomy in Church founded schools (Bray, 2001). The tension one can detect here resonates with concerns already voiced Ho & Williams in Agency theory who said increasing the number of non directors enhances the likelihood of having a board that is both independent and efficient. If agenda-setting is perceived as externally influenced or predetermined, it can undermine trust in the board's strategic leadership and limit the effectiveness of school improvement planning (Caldwell & Spinks, 2013). It is critical to create a clear governance structure that enable boards to benefit from institutional support without being pocketed with it. This requires clear role definitions, transparent agenda-setting processes, and stakeholder input mechanisms that can help preserve a balance between operational integration and strategic autonomy.

The study also found a notable negative correlation with agenda-setting autonomy (-0.545). This indicates that school leaders perceive a potential trade-off between maintaining close institutional ties and preserving independent agenda-setting capabilities. These findings, based on head teachers' and DoS' perspectives, suggest that board independence is perceived as a multifaceted construct. School leaders' responses indicate that while certain aspects of board independence naturally cluster together, there are also inherent tensions between institutional relationships and autonomous governance. This understanding provides valuable insights for enhancing board effectiveness in educational institutions while acknowledging the complex realities observed by school leaders.

The analyses collectively reveal board independence as a complex construct. While head teachers and DoS perceive strong independence in agenda-setting and operational matters, they identify challenges in maintaining objective decision-making processes. The statistical analyses confirm these patterns are not random, suggesting systematic variations in board independence across different governance aspects. The factor analysis further demonstrates how these elements cluster into distinct dimensions of board functioning, highlighting both synergies and tensions in governance autonomy.

This indicates a clear need to strengthen objective decision-making processes especially in the agenda setting and stakeholder engagement within school boards. Additionally, there is an evident requirement for better balancing institutional relationships with operational independence. The analysis also suggests the importance of enhancing stakeholder engagement while maintaining board autonomy in decision-making processes.

Conclusion

This study concludes that head teachers and Directors of Studies perceive school board autonomy and decision-making as a multifaceted construct, where objective decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and freedom from external influences are interdependent elements crucial for effective governance. While internal protocols and committee structures promote autonomy, the influence of

foundation bodies, particularly religious authorities, poses challenges to independent decision-making. The study also highlights that agenda-setting and policy generation are integral expressions of board autonomy, yet strong institutional ties can constrain this independence.

Furthermore, while material relationships with the school enhance policy-generation capacity, they may also limit stakeholder engagement, underscoring the need for a balance between operational embeddedness and strategic independence. These findings align with Agency, Stakeholder, and Stewardship theories, emphasizing the importance of clear governance structures that preserve board autonomy while ensuring accountability and inclusive participation. Therefore, reforms should focus on enhancing objective decision-making processes, balancing institutional relationships with operational independence, and strengthening stakeholder engagement to foster effective and inclusive governance in Catholic grant-aided secondary schools.

Recommendations

From these extensive research findings, we present strategic recommendations for enhancing governance and operational excellence within Catholic-founded, government-aided secondary schools in Uganda. The primary focus is strengthening board independence through institutionalized evidence-based decision-making procedures, comprehensive board member training programs, and robust stakeholder engagement mechanisms. Essential to this framework is the implementation of rigorous conflict-of-interest review processes to maintain board autonomy and transparency.

Management systems enhancement demands establishing integrated communication infrastructure across all organizational levels. This should be accompanied by comprehensive performance recognition frameworks incorporating financial and non-financial incentives. Clear organizational structures with delineated roles and responsibilities will minimize redundancy and maximize operational efficiency.

Strategic board engagement should be reinforced through comprehensive guidelines for participation across academic and co-curricular domains. Regular performance evaluation mechanisms with structured feedback protocols will ensure continuous improvement and accountability. Moreover, integrating board expertise in long-term strategic planning and organizational development will strengthen institutional capacity and sustainability.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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