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Exploring the Role and Status of Catholic Private Secondary Schools in Kenya

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Abstract:

Globally, the Catholic Church is recognized as one of the major champions of formal education. In Kenya, over 31% of all primary to postsecondary learning institutions are either public sponsored and, or, privately-managed by the Catholic Church. Besides the high demand for education in these schools, they also pride in their chronological niche of excellence which is anchored on the philosophy of holistic education and faith formation. This paper presents findings of a study conducted to determine views about the role and status of the Catholic private schools in Kenya. The study was centered on prevailing sustainability threats of these secondary schools in relation to the diminishing catholic identity, enrolment rates and level of students' academic achievement. The convergent parallel approach of the mixed methods research design was employed. The study was conducted in 16 Catholic secondary schools located in two catholic dioceses of Kenya. A sample of 112 respondents was selected using the purposive sampling and census techniques. Data was collected using standardized questionnaire, interview schedule and document analysis guides. While the study revealed an increase in student enrolment in the past five year, it emerged the tenets of catholic school identity has diminished significantly over time. Moreover, the sustainability of these schools was threatened by low students' performance, low retention rates, high rate of teacher turnover, financial constraints and low standards of school infrastructure and learning facilities. The study recommended the need to reclaim catholic identity in the schools, and particularly by returning the presence of religious men and women in teaching and school administration. It also recommended the establishment of a national and diocesan quality standards boards to collectively oversee school administration, teacher management and financial management. School managers also need to professionally manager school revenue while identifying alternative sources of funding to improve the learning environment. This includes employing appropriate competitive strategies to attract and retain students, teachers and staff in the school.

Keywords: Catholic Church, catholic identity, competitive market strategy, sustainability

1. Introduction

Fundamentally, the vibrant engagement of the Catholic Church in formal education spaces is integrally tied to the evangelizing mission of Christianity. As noted in the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to His disciplines 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you'(Mathew 28:19-20), education remains a very significant activity of the Church. Specifically, Convey (2012) asserts that the Catholic Church establishes schools to teach academics and transmit Christian faith for the conversion of humanity. In the statements of Pope John Paul II affirms that the church and societies have depended on education for the cultural and ethical formation of the young persons for generations. As such the Church establishes schools as the instruments of her apostolate to teach and shape students' personality in the light of the Gospel (John Paul II 1984b as cited in Makosa, 2020).

One of the extreme aspects of Catholic schools is that they must be genuinely Catholic; in their self-understanding and Catholic in their identity. To begin with, a Catholic school must be first founded on Jesus Christ, the Redeemer who, through His Incarnation, is united with each student As Miller (2006) asserts, Christ is the center and fulcrum of the entire enterprise, the Light shining on every boy and girl who comes into a Catholic school. Secondly, the gospel of Jesus Christ and His very person inspire and guide the Catholic school in every dimension of its life and activity. This includes the philosophy of education, curriculum, community life, selection of teachers, and even the physical environment.

Secondly, Christ is the vital principle in Catholic schools. As Miller (2006) asserts, Catholic schools should be the living and proactive memory of Christ. This implies everyone in a Catholic school should be aware of the living presence of Jesus, the Master who walks with everyone through the journey of life. Pope John Paul II message to the National Catholic Education Association (1979) affirmed that the inspiration of Jesus and His Gospel spirit should permeate all facets of the

school climate. This also means that Catholic schools must be wary not to fall into the trap of any secular academic success culture which may put this Christological focus and its accompanying understanding of the human person of the human person in second place.

Lastly the definite purpose of Catholic education is anchored on the formation of boys and girls who will be good citizens of this world. According to Cornelio (2018), learners who pass through Catholic schools should be prepared and nurtured to love God and neighbor, and so enrich the society with the leaven of the Gospel. Welbank (2011) adds that Catholic schools are established to foster development of the whole man, just as Christ is a Perfect Man. This includes cultivating human values in accordance with the particular mission to serve all men in the figure of Christ – who ennoble man and the model which the Catholic schools offer to their learners.

To achieve this Gospel guiding role, Catholic school communities are, fundamentally, expected to maintain and continually strengthen their Catholic identity. In Tudy (2014), this is the definite mark which expresses the centrality of Christ and His living message of salvation throughout the school environment. In addition, the Catholic identity allows learners, staff, parents and the wider community to encounter faith in the school structures, processes, relationships and all the learning contexts, regardless of the quality of the school buildings, equipment and programs (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977; Brennan, 2012; O'Connell, 2012; Convey, 2012 & Krebbs, 2012). Specifically, Pope John Paul II summarized the notion of Catholic identity through *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* enumerating the fundamental marks of being Catholic as: 1) a Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the school community; 2) a continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge; 3) fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church; and 4) school commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life (Miller, 2006).

1.1. Introduction to Catholic Schools in Kenya

In Kenya, the arrival of Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century pioneered the development of formal education and the establishment of schools. Whilst the primary goal of these missionaries was to spread the Good News among the Africans, the provision of education through schools became their most effective tool (Njino, Mubeya & Ndiku, 2010). Precisely, the Catholic mission schools' areas were regarded as *prayer houses* that empowered people with literacy skills as they grew in faith through the teachings and paths of Jesus Christ (Kimeli, 2018; Majawa, 2014; Muthama, 2017). The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) report of 2018 indicates that over 31% of all educational institutions in Kenya are under the Catholic Church. They include: 10,090 early learning and basic education schools, 220 vocational training centers, 21 teachers training colleges (TTC), one Catholic University and three University Colleges under the Catholic Church. These institutions are further categorized as either public sponsored or privately owned by the Catholic Church. The public sponsored institutions are mostly those Catholic-established schools and colleges that were taken over or handed over to the Government of Kenya immediately after independence. On the other hand, the Catholic private schools were retained by the Catholic Church after independence with several new ones were set up and registered as private entities under the jurisdiction of the Bishops (Adhiambo, 2019; Chura & Mwaura, 2013; Sifuna & Otiende, 2009).

1.2. The Context: Catholic Private Schools in Kenya

In Kenya, there are over 2,030 Catholic private primary schools and 153 secondary schools. These schools are managed within the traditions and doctrines of the Catholic Church under jurisdiction of the bishops of the 26 Dioceses of Kenya. They are also established as charitable or not-for-profit private institutions of the Catholic Church under the respective dioceses and religious congregations (Republic of Kenya, 2013; KCCB, 2012).

According to the Catholic Education Act 2012, the purpose of every Catholic school is to promote holistic education and faith development. To achieve this, schools are expected to pay great attention to the values of Catholic identity and the spiritual formation and the character development among the learners, teachers and staff. As noted in Majawa (2014) and Muthamba (2017), all academic and non-academic practices should have the learners experience God first hand and give them a chance to understand the beliefs, purposes, and practices of Catholic faith. To achieve this, schools are expected to expose learners to the full inspiration of Jesus Christ as they prepare them academically. This implies that the school should strive to do everything in their power to form the spiritual, intellectual, physical, psychological, social, moral and religious capacities of each learner (Convey, 2012).

Within the secondary education level, the Catholic private secondary schools are categorized as minor seminaries, juniorates and, or, on-profit private secondary schools. According to Adhiambo (2019), minor seminaries are meant for academic and spiritual formation of young men who desire priestly vocation, while juniorate secondary schools to prepare girls and young women for religious life as Catholic nuns.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

For many years, Catholic schools have stood out as top performers in character formation and academic performance. In fact, tradition has been that majority of the schools that emerge in top positions in national examinations and extracurricular activities are often the Catholic schools. Consequently, the demand for Catholic schools, particularly at the public secondary education level, has remained high. Many parents and guardians have often confessed that they place a lot of value on the commitment of Catholic schools' academic excellence of a Catholic school and character formation for their children. On the contrary, the same reports have revealed a diminishing presence of Catholic private secondary schools. Indeed, some famed private schools have been closed while several others are struggling to remain in. Moreover, with widespread accounts of student indiscipline and misbehavior have been reported in a number of Catholic private

secondary schools in Kenya. Having noted that the Catholic Church has been struggling with the dilemma of sustaining these schools, this study sought to assess the status of selected Catholic private secondary schools in Kenya. The researchers had further noted that there exists inadequate research output for the development of competitive strategies to support private secondary schools within the current educational landscape in Kenya.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- To assess the extent to which the tenets of Catholic identity are adhered to in Catholic private secondary schools.
- To evaluate the retention rates of students in Catholic private secondary schools
- To assess the academic performance of students in the Catholic private secondary schools.
- To establish strategies that could help to gain competitive advantage in Catholic private secondary schools

1.5. Material and Methods

The study adopted the mixed methods research design using the convergent parallel approach (Creswell, 2014). In this case, the quantitative and qualitative methods were used to complement each other, thus increase validity of the findings. The research targeted 16 Catholic private secondary schools located within two Catholic dioceses in the Eastern region of Kenya. These represented 10% of the Catholic private secondary schools in Kenya. Using the census and random sampling techniques, 112 respondents were selected from school managers, chaplains, principals, patrons of Catholic students' movements, deans of studies and heads of counseling department and parent representatives. Data was collected using standardized questionnaire, document analysis guides and interview guides. Data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative techniques. Ethical issues such as obtaining permits, informed consent, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality were considered throughout the study.

2. Study Findings, Discussion and Conclusion

This research was conducted to explore the status and role of Catholic private secondary schools in Kenya and this section presents the findings guided by the research objectives.

2.1. ResponseRate

This study targeted 112 participants who were selected from 16 Catholic Private Secondary Schools in Kenya. These were seven (7) boys' schools and nine (9) girls' secondary schools. Overall, 84 respondents participated in the study, representing a response rate of 75% as presented in Table 1. These were 16 school principals, nine managers, four chaplains, seven parents' representatives and 16 heads of department in Guidance and Counselling, Curriculum, and Young Catholic Students (YCS) movement in each school.

Respondents	Sample Size	Response Frequency	Per Cent
Principal	16	16	100
Manager	16	09	56
Chaplain	16	04	25
PA representative	16	07	44
Head of Curriculum (Dean of Studies)	16	16	100
Head Young Catholic Students Association	16	16	100
Head Guidance and Counselling	16	16	100
Total	112	84	75

Table 1: Response Rate

This response rate agreed with Mugenda and Mugenda (2012) assertion that a response rate that is above 70% is excellent for analysis and reporting. A further analysis indicated that 46 respondents were males while 38 were female representing a gender participation of 55 % and 45 % respectively. Amongst the boys' schools, there were two minor seminaries. These are schools that established to enrol and prepare teenage boys for religious life in priesthood and or brotherhood.

2.2. Adherence to the Tenets of Catholic Identity

2.2.1. Staff in the Catholic Private Secondary Schools

This study found that 20% of the respondents were ordained Catholic religious men and women, while the other 80% were lay persons. These were 11 priests, five religious nuns, one religious brother, 57 lay teachers and 11 parents. Among the lay persons, 45% were Catholics while 35% were non-Catholics as illustrated in Table 2.

	Catholic Religious		Lay			
	Frequency	per cent	Catholic Denomination		Non-Catholics	
			Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	per cent
Male	12	14	21	25	16	20
Female	05	06	17	20	13	15
Total	17	20	38	45	29	35

Table 2: Catholic Analysis of the Respondents
(n=84)

From these findings, it emerged that the Catholic private secondary schools had more Catholic staff (65%). The findings further indicated that all the school principals were Catholics which, according to the Catholic Education Policy (2012) 'every Catholic school should be headed by a devout faithful who can promote and model the Catholic faith within the school.' This finding also supported Fuller and Johnson's (2013) assertion that Catholic schools should, by tradition, have a majority of staff, if not all, as practicing Catholics. Conversely, these findings also showed that there were few (20%) of religious men and women in the Catholic private secondary schools. This finding concurred with the findings of Convey (2016) and Miller (2016) and the rising concerns of diminishing presence of priests and religious communities in Catholic schools. This also implied that with less religious men and women, these schools lacked models who enrich the school climate with the distinctive Catholic ethos and identity.

2.2.2. Teacher Registration of Principals in the Catholic Private Secondary Schools

The study found that only 31.25% of the principals were registered teachers while 68.75% were not registered by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) as presented in Table 3.

Gender	Catholic	Religious	Lay	Teaching Qualification	TSC Registered
Male	07	07	01	01	01
Female	09	03	05	04	02
Total	16	10	06	05	03

Catholic Identity and Teaching Qualification of the Principals
(n=16)

On closer analysis of the teaching qualification that permits teachers and principals to register with TSC, it emerged that all the male religious principals were not trained teachers nor were they registered by the TSC. During the interviews with one of the religious male principal respondents, he stated,

I know very well that TSC regulations require all principals to be trained, but the duties I hold in running this school...and at the parish are so heavy on me that I have not found time to go back to college for teacher training...I wish I could make it! (Principal's interview excerpt).

Nevertheless, this finding revealed that two of the three religious female principals were trained teachers, while the remaining female principal indicated plan to join teacher training. In her words, she stated:

Before I came to Kenya, I was in charge of a secondary school in Mexico (pseudonym) for nine years. I love educating young girls and even though I do not have to required teacher training skills my passion in promoting education is my greatest motivation. However, I have been attending several educational management seminars and workshop to improve my skills, but very soon I will be joining a university to study education very soon.'

In addition, the principals who had teacher training skills had attained different levels of qualifications. These were seven principals with Bachelor's degree in Education (43.75%) and one with a Master's Degree in Education (6.25%) while the other 50% had attained other academic qualifications as illustrated in Table 4.

Qualification	Religious Male	Religious Female	Lay Male	Lay Female
Diploma in Education	00	00	00	00
Bachelor Degree in Education	00	01	01	05
Master's degree in Education	00	01	00	00
Other Qualifications	07	01	00	00

Table 4: Level of Training in Teacher Education of the Principals
(n=16)

Further analysis of the respondents representing heads of departments showed that 88% were lay teachers while 12% were religious men and women. Additionally, 47% had teacher training qualification and TSC registration, while 56% were untrained teachers.

Gender	Religious	Lay	Catholic	Non-Catholic	Teaching Qualification	TSC Registered	Untrained Teachers
Male	02	26	14	08	07	02	16
Female	04	16	17	09	14	04	11
Total	06	42	31	17	21	06	27

Table 5: Catholic Identity and Characteristics of Heads of Departments
(n=48)

By implication, these results indicated that a majority (50%) of the principals lacked the required teacher education qualification for TSC registration. Moreover, 56% of the teachers who worked as heads of department in were untrained teachers. This finding contravened with the TSC Act (2012) Section 23 (2) which prohibits any person from engaging in teaching service unless registered as a teacher. This finding further outstretched disquiets on the quality of educational leadership that is offered in schools when the principal head lacks to requisite educational knowledge and skills. As Aina (2013) and Curtis (2015) state, it is fundamentally wrong to allow anybody who is trained as a teacher to manage a learners and instructional processes in a school setting. Moreover, the strong presence of lay teachers (88%) confirms Gleeson et.al (2018) assertion that the faith-based identify of Catholic schools is getting eroded by the rapidly diminishing number of teachers belonging to Religious Orders.

2.2.3. Symbols and Rituals of Catholic Identity in Private Secondary Schools

The Catholic Church believes that education is a diving mission that is supposed to ensure the formation of the whole person, and for the eternal destiny of all learners. This section examined the extent to which the private Catholic secondary schools observed the tenets of Catholic education and practices for the ultimate goal of helping students to arrive at the fullness of Christian life. As presented in Table 6, the findings indicated that the schools integrated the transmission of the Catholic faith with the teaching and non-teaching functions, though at varying levels.

Characteristic	Frequency	%
Display of Catholic symbols (crucifix, icon, statue, images, chapel, symbols)	06	40
Daily school prayers are part of life in the school	15	100
Daily Mass is part of life in the school	07	46.7
The schools integrate Catholic teachings in the formal curriculum	10	66.7
The schools mark the Liturgical Celebrations of Catholic faith	15	100
The schools celebrate special feasts (founder/patron saint)	05	33.3
The principal is a religious brother, nun or priest	06	40
The principal is Catholic	15	100
Vast majority of teachers are Catholic	11	73.3
Head of YCS is Catholic	13	86.7
Head of Guidance and Counselling is Catholic	11	73.3
Head of Curriculum is Catholic	08	53.3
Teacher of Christian Religious Education are Catholic	10	66.7
Vast majority of students are Catholic	11	73.3
Vast majority of support staff are Catholic	11	73.3
Vast majority of Parents are Catholic	12	80
The school has a resident Chaplain	04	26.7
PPI programs present the teaching of the Catholic Church	08	53.3
The schools participate in Christian service and outreach	15	100

Table 6: Catholic Identity in Private Catholic Secondary Schools
(n=16)

Table 6, the finding revealed that the schools observed the Catholic culture the identity of Catholic schools is integrally associated with the trans-mission of the Catholic faith. Convey (2012) saw the common institutional culture of Catholic schools in terms of faith community, service, rituals, and symbols.

2.3. Benefits of Private Catholic Secondary Schools

This study also sought to establish the extent to which the Catholic Church benefits from investing in Private Secondary Schools in Kenya. From the findings, 86% of the respondents agreed that the Catholic Church used schools as their avenues of evangelization. As one of the respondents stated,

Our Catholic schools are a fundamentally the foundation of the church. The culture of this school rotates around our Catholic faith and everything that we do is part of our prayer life. WE start and end the day with prayers, we offer catechism classes to sustain the Catholic faith across the generations. (Interview excerpt)

In the interviews with chaplains, one of the respondents had this to say,

This is Catholic secondary school was established to prepare young men for religious life. We pride in the countless priests and religious brothers who once studied in this school and now serve the church in various parts of the world, (Interview excerpt)

The findings also indicated that private secondary schools benefited the Church local communities in terms sponsorship (40%), access to job opportunities (70%), and the ultimate access to social amenities (74%). Similarly, the Catholic Church also receives additional revenue through their schools as presented in Table 7.

Response	Frequency	%
Education Sector		
High Quality Education with religious background to students	54	64
Sponsors the needy but bright students	34	40
Relatively affordable school fees	43	51
Produces discipline and strong moral valued students to the society	55	65
Financial contribution to the church	65	77
Job creation to the Catholic Religious (Fathers, Sisters, Priests, Catechists who are principals/teachers in the schools)	36	43
Students/Alumni become evangelists/crusaders of the Catholic church	27	32
Job creations (subordinate staff of the schools)	59	70
Development of social amenities and infrastructure	62	74
Strong religious foundation to the students and alumni	54	64

Table 7: Benefits of Private Catholic Secondary Schools -
(n=84)

While these findings revealed the direct benefits of running these schools, some respondents also argued that these schools were also a burden to the church. In one of the interview responses, the interviewee had this to say,

There is time when I have to go to the congregation to ask for financial support to run this school. This problem began when we started having low student enrolments. At time the principal comes to me asking for food to feed the students, while other times she needs money to pay salaries. We no longer get sponsors to support us so the reliance on fees is a big problem for us. This is also the reason why the school admits any students who desires to study here. While it is true that a Catholic school is for everyone, at time our financial constraints push us to admit students throughout the terms (Interview excerpt)

These findings concurred with previous study results showing that Catholic schools continue to provide high economic and social contribution to the Church and the communities at large (Adhiambo, 2019; Kabutia, 2014). In particular, the religious formation of learners in Catholic school education helps the church to raise generations that recognise the presence of Christ in themselves and others (Cornelio, 2018). On the other hand, the Catholic communities also provide reciprocal benefits to their Catholic schools when members offer scholarships and contributions towards these schools.

2.4. Status of School Retention in Catholic Private Secondary Schools

This study also examined the status of student retention in the target Catholic private secondary schools using data from student class registers and admission records for the last five years. To begin with, it emerged that complete student records were available in only five of the 16 schools that were involved in the study. This implied that 68.75% of the schools did not preserve updated annual admission records and termly class registers as sources of information on enrolment and retention. Secondly, analyses of the available data in the five schools revealed high drop rates particularly in Form 2 and Form 4 as presented in Table 8.

School	Enrolment						
	Form 1	Form 2	Form 3	Form 4	AvE	ExE	ER (%)
A	41	36	38	31	37	40	93
B	12	11	19	11	15	40	38
C	29	31	31	26	29	40	73
D	51	43	46	48	49	40	123
E	23	15	33	31	29	40	73
AcE	156	136	167	147	159	200	80
ExE	200	200	200	200	200	200	100
ER (%)	78	82	84	74	80	100	80

Table 8: Total Enrolment in 5 Secondary Schools from 2015/2019

Key: EcE= Actual Enrolment; AvE = Average Enrolment ExE =Expected Enrolment; ER=Enrolment Rate

Thirdly, the study found that student drop out was highly associated with school fees (60%) and low academic performance among the students (57%) as presented in Table 9. In addition, the respondents agreed reduced sources of

sponsors and lack of scholarships for students who join the private secondary schools adversely affected student enrolment and retention. As one of the interviewees stated,

...this school was started as a rescue center for girls from the local community. Initially we had a lot of international and local sponsors who paid fees and provided all the personal effects for the girls to remain in school. This changed over time and today it is the parents who struggle to keep their daughters in school. We have limited alternative sources of funds to retain those who cannot pay school fees – so they drop out. (school manager interview excerpt).

This study also found that the challenges of student numbers and low retention had affected some of the schools to the extent that they openly diverted from the philosophy around their establishment. For instance, a review of student records revealed admission of non-Christian student in a school whose mandate is to prepare young Catholic men for priesthood and religious life. In the interview with a respondent from this school, the demand for revenue to run and sustain school operations often influenced such decisions. In the words of this interviewee,

We are aware that this is a minor seminary and the purpose of its existence. However, our struggles to remain open have made us overlook some of our admission criteria. It is true that we have admitted students from other religions ...but we often vet them and agree with their parents that they (boys) must strictly follow the Catholic rules and doctrines of this school. (interview excerpt of a respondent).

On the other hand, the study also revealed parents who retained their children in the Catholic private secondary schools indicated that these schools exposed their sons and daughters to holistic education and spiritual formation. One of the parents had this to say, *all my daughters have studied in this school. The culture of daily prayers and attending worship services mould them very well. They are disciplined and their academic performance has never disappointed us. In fact, a daughter of my neighbor back at home is now a Catholic nun and she was formed into that vocation where she was a student of this school. (interview excerpt of a respondent).*

Furthermore, 60% of the respondents indicated that the introduction of free day public secondary schools affected the retention of the students who joined the Catholic private schools. This was particularly noted among student whose parents could not afford the tuition and accommodation fees that is charged in the Catholic private secondary schools. The other reasons that were mentioned include low academic performance (57%), lack of qualified teachers (53%) and restricted subject selection among the students in the targeted schools (53%).

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Poor academic performance of the school in the previous years	7	57
Entry of affordable free public day schools	9	60
Lack of attaining pass mark entry for form 1 students	8	53
High school fees	9	60
Inadequate learning materials	6	38
Inadequate qualified teachers	8	53
Low motivation to remain in school	7	47
Limited subject selection	8	53

Table 9: Reasons for Low Student Retention in the Catholic Private Secondary Schools

A close examination of the subject that were offered in the targeted Catholic private secondary schools confirmed that schools offered limited opportunities for subject selection particularly in sciences and technical subjects listed in Table 10.

Group 1 (Compulsory)	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
English*, Kiswahili*, Mathematics*	Biology*, Physics*, Chemistry*, Biological Sciences for blind students)	History and Government*, Geography*, Christian Religious Education*	Home Science*, Art and Design, Agriculture*, Computer Studies, Aviation, Electricity, Power Mechanics, Woodwork	French, German, Music, Business Studies*

Table 10

*Subjects Offered in the Schools

This evidently indicated that students who enrolled in the Catholic private secondary schools were deprived of opportunities for subject choices as provided in the secondary curriculum. Indeed, the study found that these schools only offered the compulsory subjects with narrow opportunities for subjects such Music, Foreign Languages, Art and Design among others. These subject areas are showed in Table 11.

Subject Areas	Frequency	Per cent
All compulsory Subjects	15	100
Christian Religious Education	15	100
Biology	15	100
Chemistry	15	100
Physics	11	73
Geography	13	87
History	15	100
Computer Studies	01	07
Business Studies	14	93
Agriculture	15	100
Home Science	02	13
Total	135	79
Music	00	00
French	00	00
German	00	00
Art and Design	00	00
Power Mechanics	00	00
Electricity	00	00
Woodwork	00	00
Biological science for blind students	00	00
Aviation	00	00

Table 11: Responses on the Subjects That Are Taught and Examined in KCSE
Source: School Records (2019)

From these findings, it emerged that the Catholic private secondary schools offer 12 subject areas which represented 54.5% of the overall subjects available for secondary education students and KCSE examinations. Affirming this finding, 89% of the school principals indicated that they had limited capacity to offer wider subject areas. They cited inadequacy of learning resources and lack of qualified teachers as the main reasons that could not offer the other subjects.

2.5. Students' Academic Performance in Catholic Private Secondary Schools

This study sought to assess the academic performance of the target Catholic private in secondary schools using the mean scores attained in the national examinations (KCSE). From the findings, the performance of boys' secondary schools was higher than the girls' schools with an average mean of 3.668 and 3.145 respectively. In addition, the average mean score of the target secondary schools, at 3.406 was far lower than the national mean score (.....) over the same period (2015-2019). This five-year analysis is presented in Table 12.

Category	Year						Number of schools
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Average	
Boys	4.322	4.001	3.012	3.457	3.549	3.668	7
Girls	3.576	3.087	2.976	3.098	2.987	3.145	9
Average	3.949	3.544	2.994	3.277	3.268	3.406	16

Table 12: Average KCSE Mean score in Catholic Private Secondary Schools

A deeper examination of the causes of low academic performance in the targeted schools revealed that most schools lacked inadequate learning resources (82%). Affirming this in the HoD interviews, the respondents concurred that most schools had few teachings text books, reference materials and sparsely equipped science laboratories. As one of the respondents stated,

'I have been in this school for the last four years. Teachers have very few reference books while students share the few text books available. We do not even have a library or a computer for teachers to use.' (Interview excerpt).

Another respondent had this to say,

'I am one of Science teachers in this school. We have a very small laboratory that is shared for all the science subjects. We also have very few equipment and without a lab technician to support teachers prepare for practicals, this continues to affect student performance in sciences, and ultimately their overall KCSE grades. In addition, I am the only Chemistry and biology teacher in the whole school and my workload does not allow me think of practical work - I just teach leave the rest (practicals) to the final examination. It is not good at all.' (Interview excerpt).

In another finding from the principal interviews, most schools were struggling to retain high performing students. As one respondent stated, *we often admit boys with good KCPE grades on Form 1, but by Form 2 most of them transfer. Consequently, we remain with boys who have very low motivation to remain in school and their performance is always very low. Due to the school's financial constraints, we are not able to retain qualified and experienced teachers because they constantly leave us when we do not pay them very well. We end up depending on untrained teachers who are not able to give us the desired academic results.*

The other causes of low academic performance included high teacher turnover (81%), low entry marks among the student who remain or transfer to these schools (79%) and school absenteeism as the students are often sent home for fees (42%). The other challenges are listed in Table 13

Areas of	Frequency	Per cent
Inadequate tuition and learning resources	92	82
High teacher turnover	91	81
Low entry marks in Form 1	89	79
Low entry marks of new students in F2 and F3	51	46
Absenteeism due to fees challenges	47	42
Inadequate sources of revenue to provide learning resources	39	35
Lack of government support in quality assurance	31	28
Limited access to government bursaries and scholarships	23	21

Table 13: Causes of Low Academic Performance in the Catholic Private Secondary Schools

2.2.5. Strategies to Gain Competitive Advantage for the Catholic Private Secondary Schools

The respondents were asked to recommend strategies that could be used to improve the competitive advantage in Catholic private secondary schools. A majority suggested the following approaches:

Raise awareness at national and diocesan levels for all catholic schools' stakeholders to collectively promote, nurture and guard the mission, ideals and traditions of Catholic schools.

Engage religious congregations to teach in the private secondary schools. This includes enrolling more religious men and women in teacher training colleges and universities and subsequently registering them with the TSC for quality teaching and learning experience.

Establish quality assurance and standards mechanisms for all the Catholic private secondary schools. This includes effective stakeholder engagement, recruitment of professionals in the school's board and alternative avenues of revenue generation for school development

Each school should have the required management and performance tools, such as school development plans, financial management plans, strategic plans, human resources management and customer service charters.

The Ministry of Education should partner with the Catholic Church and offer necessary support in teacher recruitment, school fees capitation, and the overall management of the schools. This partnership may extend to fundraising support for school infrastructure development and the overall quality of teaching and learning in Catholic private secondary schools in Kenya

3. References

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