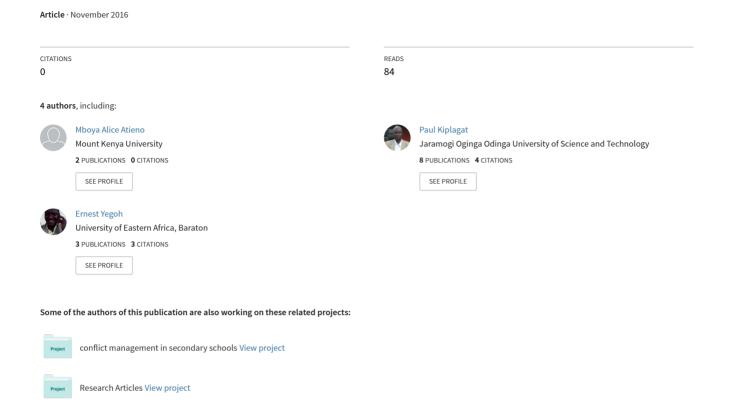
## Collaboration Conflict Management Strategy: A Solution to Secondary Schools "Unrests in Kenya



# Collaboration Conflict Management Strategy: A Solution to Secondary Schools' Unrests in Kenya

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Abstract-- The study assessed strategies for effective Management of conflicts in public secondary schools and averting school unrest amongst students as perceived by principals, school board of management and students in Kenya. A total of 26 school principals, 104 Board of Management members, 183 teachers and 370 students participated in the study. Random and purposive sampling techniques were used to obtain the sample for the study. Data collection was done using self-made questionnaire which had been validated by experts and subjected to a pilot study and an overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.876 was obtained. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data. The findings of the study revealed that collaboration conflict management strategy was rated the best strategy of solving and averting conflicts in secondary schools in Kenya. Schools which employed this strategy had not experienced any unrest for the last 10 years and revealed progressive academic performance. The method allows the students together with the administration to work together, sacrifice time, energies and resources.

**Keywords--** Conflict, Conflict management, Collaboration, Strategy, Unrest

#### I. INTRODUCTION

In the recent past, Kenyan public secondary schools have witnessed a unique spate of unrests expressed in burning of schools. Over 100 public secondary schools suffered the burning of either dormitories, laboratories or libraries (Sunday Nation, July 31, 2016). The arson attacks were so serious that they captured the concern of all educational stakeholders including the president (The Standard Team, 31 July, 2016). A lot of suggestions were made in search for a permanent solution to the problem including: introduction of Guidance and Counseling, re-introduction of corporal punishment, open interaction and communication among students and teachers, scrapping of mock exams and overhauling the education system, among others (Infotrak Research and Consulting, July 28, 2016). This study views these attacks as the outcomes of ignored grievances, disputes and complains or poorly managed conflicts between the students and administration. It is a fact that conflicts when not effectively managed have the potential of spiraling with disastrous consequences as witnessed in Kenyan public secondary schools. This study seeks to find a solution to the conflicts that culminate into arsons in our schools.

Conflict is a household term in most secondary schools as it is part and parcel of coexistence. According to Bano & Ashraf (2013), conflict refers to a condition of incompatibility between two or more parties. Anja, Lopes da Fonseca, Mariana; Baskaran, Thushyanthan, (2015) consider conflict as an opposition or competition between two or more forces pursuing incompatible goals or a group with opposing views. According to Okoth, et al. (2016), Conflict can be referred to as the real or misconstrued opposition of needs, values and

interests. It is therefore a dispute, opposition or disagreements between individuals or groups of people. Conflict occurs when people take opposing stands concerning issues and this can be expressed verbally or through actions. As conflicts are inevitable, it is believed that there will always be disagreements among school administration, teachers and students. But the disputes ought not to be left to get out of hand

In a school context, conflict is an expression of hostility, antagonism and misunderstanding among principals, teachers and students (Ghaffar, 2008). Conflicts may present through; students not obeying school rules, students not doing manual work, students not respecting teachers, students engaging in vices like theft, fights, bullying or not attending lessons; teachers not respecting the principal or not completing curriculum, the principal's style of leadership demeaning teachers and disregarding students, among others. These conflicts have negative effects on the school administration; lowering teachers' morale, students' discipline and, and also hampering the general interpersonal relationships in an institution (Ghaffar, 2008). Students and teachers need care and support from the principal. When conflicts arise, they expect to be given a chance to express their needs and an opportunity to participate in seeking amicable solutions. It is therefore imperative that the school managers carefully listen to the needs of the students and teachers and deal with them appropriately to avert negative exertions. Positive attitudes reduce conflicts in the school.

Conflicts usually affect a wider spectrum than the individuals involved and can therefore harm relationships and interdependence in diverse ways. Consequently, they affect students' behavior, academic performance and the general school climate; the more reason why conflicts in school should be effectively managed (Ghaffar, 2008). Bano & Ashraf, (2013) believe that conflicts are not always bad. The concern is how they are managed. When conflicts are constructively managed, they add value to the organization as opposed to when they are poorly managed; they turn destructive. Thus, conflicts need to be effectively managed for the proper functioning of any individual, group or organization (school).

#### II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Generally, a school needs a calm atmosphere for proper, productive and successful learning and teaching to be achieved. However, according to media reports, Infotrak Research and Consulting (2016), Standard Team, (July, 2016) and Nation Team (July, 2016), school unrests and arsons are on the rise and have wrecked public secondary schools in Kenya. These are manifestations of increased and poorly managed conflicts within schools. This study assessed effective Management of conflicts strategies of preventing unrests in public secondary schools in Kenya. It is the researcher's opinion that if an effective method of conflict management is not adopted by school principals in good time,

the disputes in schools may escalate to even more dangerous levels. It is therefore against this backdrop that this study was conceived.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted 'the Systems theory' by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the year 1968. A System Theory is a multidisciplinary study of the abstract organization of phenomena and the interdependence of their substance in existence. The theory is a holistic view of the organization focusing on the interrelationships of the structures and the human behavior in the production of a variety of variables within the organization. The theory states that a system is made of regularly interacting or interdependent groups of activities or parts that form a whole. This concept aids the understanding of interactions between individuals, groups, organizations and even the larger society.

This study assessed collaboration conflict management strategy as a solution to the numerous school infernos in Kenya. A school is an organization and a system and needs to be run on the same principles for effective administration and achievement of set goals. The theory enriched the study since it mainly focuses on management of organizations and thus enables the school managers to understand the interdependence and interactions of the objects in a system and how to enhance the interpersonal relationships within a system. The theory claims that a system consists of four elements: the objects, the attributes, the internal relationships among objects and the environment. Since conflicts are inevitable in such an environment, it is therefore necessary that these elements are harnessed by use of appropriate conflict management strategy, to work together in harmony for the desired outcome. The theory provides a wealth of knowledge and a deeper understanding of how to run a system. Ikoya & Akinseinde, (2009) support the theory by asserting that schools are more effectively managed in an environment of harmony among principals, teachers and students. Thus, when there is minimum conflict in the school, all activities run smoothly and students learn better. It is a practical tool to be adopted by educational managers in sustaining pedagogy (Porter, 2009).

#### IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. Causes of Conflicts in School

Causes of conflicts are diverse. They could range from as simple issues as disliking a colleague, gossip, lateness, to more complex ones as role incompatibility, inferiority or superiority complex or leadership styles.

A study by Ghaffar (2010) revealed that school-based conflicts in secondary schools in the U.S. were caused by shared resources, differences in goals, difference in perceptions and values, disagreements in the role requirements and nature of work while UNICEF (2010) reported that school-based conflicts in West and Central Africa were caused by discrimination, educational system, sexual violence and unbefitting correctional measures by teachers. Kipyegon (2013) established that causes of conflicts in Kenyan secondary schools included: shared resources, inadequate facilities, basic values, interpersonal relationships and misappropriation of resource, among others. According to Infotrak Research and Consulting, (2016), conflicts are caused by: lack of values and discipline among students, stress among students, negative peer pressure, unrealistic rules, poor communication between students and teachers, poor relationships between administration and teachers, among others. A good conflict management strategy needs to be employed by the principals of schools so as to prevent destructive conflicts.

#### B. Conflict Management

Conflict management is an integral part of the principal's responsibilities. The principal, being the conflict manager, beside other duties, requires credible personal traits, educational qualifications and work experience in order to appropriately deal with the challenges of institutional management (Okoth et al, 2016). This expertise is best seen in the style of managing conflicts in the institution. Since conflicts have the potential of advancing to more confiscation by day, the principals have to put in place management mechanisms for putting them in check so that they do not unnecessarily cause physical, psychological or emotional exertions.

Shahmohammadin (2014) refers to conflict management as the practice of reducing the negative and unbeneficial outcomes of disputes and promoting the positive outcomes with the intension of making learning conditions better, conducive and favorable for all players. He argues that the process of conflict management enables students, teachers and even the principal to appreciate the concepts and skills for preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts non-violently thus creating a safer and more supportive learning environments for schools where all students can learn and achieve their goals. By that, the numerous strikes, damages or burning of buildings would be kept at bay or at least reduced.

Conflict management plays a major role in the improvement of students' academic performance (Muindi, 2016). Muindi argues that if conflicts are not satisfactorily managed there will be deficiencies in a number of areas including behavior of students and academic performance. That is why Okoth, Elizabeth, Yambo,Onyango & Harmoniz, (2016), asserted that every school should strive to effectively manage conflicts by employing all methods of conflict management including guidance and counseling so as to avoid stress, unnecessary fatigue and tensions among educational stakeholders. Such may result into destructive conflicts.

There are basically five strategies of conflict management: collaboration, competing, avoidance, accommodation and compromise (Kilman, 2015). Hersey (1969) states that there is no single strategy that can be termed best for all use but the key to proper conflict management is to choose and execute the strategy that fits best in the situation at hand. Even though, Kalagbor & Nnokam (2015) consider collaboration the best method for conflict management in secondary schools.

#### C. Collaboration Conflict Management Strategy

Collaboration is a method of conflict management in which a person tries to work together with the other person (Crystal, 2007). Kofman, (2015) refers to it as constructive collaboration. He asserts that this approach reveals people's preferences and constraints, and engages everyone in constructing solutions that go way beyond the original alternatives. It maximizes efficiency through cooperation. Yet it is the most unusual because it requires shifting from unilateral control to mutual learning. He further affirms that constructive collaboration allows people to express and understand each other's needs and create new solutions. It addresses the task through consensual decision-making, the relationships through mutual respect, and each individual's self-worth through the consideration of his needs and values.

Therefore in this approach, a person makes sure that the needs of both parties and both the people involved in the conflict are satisfied. It is a situation in which, the needs of every person involved is taken into account before the final decision is made and is regarded as one of the best methods of conflict management (Eilerman, 2006). If the school principals would adopt this strategy, the unrests and arsons would be unheard of since the students' needs would be known well in advance and mechanisms for construction of solutions put in place. The students would have no cause to go onrampage since they are also involved in the solution construction.

Ghaffar, Zamin & Naz (2012) conducted a comparative study in Charsadda District, Pakistan to compare the preferred styles of conflict management by principals of public and private secondary schools. The study took a descriptive survey design and used questionnaires to collect data. The study established that the principals from the two types of schools used the same method. Their preferred conflict management style was collaboration. The study recommended that all the principals should adopt the best style of conflict management according to the situation.

Kalagbor & Nnokam (2015) also carried out a study in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to identify the principals' and teachers' level of utilization of conflict management strategies: collaboration, competing, compromising and avoiding strategies on secondary students' conflict resolution and their related outcomes in the administration of schools. The study operated on the following objectives: to determine principals' and teachers' level of utilization of integrating strategy, dominating strategy, compromising strategy and avoiding strategy management of students' conflicts. The study established that principals used more of collaboration and compromising strategies than the teachers. Their discussion revealed that the principals preferred the integrating strategy because it is a method that motivates students, makes them feel as part of the school and also gives them a fair hearing. Furthermore, principals favoured integration strategy since it enabled them to minimize students' negative behavior and enhance administrative effectiveness and students' academic performance.

In a study carried out by Momanyi, (2011) in Masaba South, Kisii County, Kenya, his main objective was to establish the effects of principals' conflict management styles on performance of teachers' duties in public secondary schools. The specific objectives were; to examine how the principal's collaborative conflict management style influences performance of teachers' duties; to identify the effects of principal's compromise conflict management style on teacher performance; to establish the influence of principals avoidance conflict management style on teacher performance; to determine how the principals accommodation conflict management style affect performance and to identify the influence of principals competing style of managing conflicts on teacher performance in secondary schools in Masaba South area. The study took a descriptive survey research design. The study made the following conclusion among others: that the principals who use collaborative conflict management styles are able to resolve conflict, since there is cooperation between him and the teachers. Hence the teachers perform their duties well. Among other recommendations, the study recommended that: there is need for the principals to examine other factors that may be affecting teachers' performance of their duties.

According to Christine, Lucy & Jonathan (2016), collaboration is assertive or co-operative. They argue that collaboration is a road not often traveled, as it can be long, and requires some skill and effort. They contend that collaboration is about assuming positive intent and seeing things from all sides, in detail. It entails about acknowledging and accepting differences, and exploring alternative solutions that meet everyone's needs and concerns. As they point out, collaboration is a useful conflict management strategy when the issues are important to everyone, and all sides need to be committed to the solution. It is also recommended where there is need to work through hard feelings or animosity. They however recommend that the best decisions are made by collaboration. If principals apply this strategy, they will be able to listen to the students' needs, grievances and settle them the best way and keep at bay any form of unrests.

Huan, & Yazdanifard, (2012) feels that there are many advantages to using a collaborating strategy to handle interpersonal conflict situations. They posit that collaborating with the other party promotes creative problem solving, and it is a way of fostering mutual respect and rapport. Thus, principals who employ collaboration can communicate freely with the students and know their needs before a conflict ensues and create mechanisms for resolution and avert any negative behavior that would otherwise arise. However, according to Wager (2013), collaborating takes time, and many conflict situations are either very urgent or too trivial to justify the time it takes to collaborate. But this review indicates that there are many conflict situations that should be handled with one of the other four conflict management strategies rather than collaboration. Good managers are those are able to understand interpersonal conflict situations and use the appropriate conflict management strategy for each situation. As such, its proper application on students' and teachers' conflict situations will promote discipline in the school and negative behavior culminating into arsons and/or any other forms of unrests will be drastically minimized.

Huan & Yazdanifard, (2012) argue that those who prefer collaboration style resolve conflicts in the best way which is accepted by all concerned parties. They view the style as one that tackles the conflict issues openly and frankly without taking sides and also communicating with all the parties. According to Huan & Yazdanifard, collaboration promotes task-goal achievement and is related to job satisfaction. This satisfaction results into high achievement for teachers and students alike.

#### V. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to assess the conflict management strategies use by school principals to curb school unrests in Kenya. In description studies there is no manipulation of variables. It simply describes phenomenon using numbers in order to portray a picture of an individual or group (Screiber, & Asner- Self, 2011). Oso & Onen, (2009) assert that surveys are studies that analyze and interpret situations that exist or once existed. This kind of study describes phenomena in their current state, past state or as the conditions is assumed to be.

#### A. Sample and Sampling Technique

From the target population, the researcher derived a sample, which is representative of the, the principals, the B.O.Ms, the teachers and the students. To obtain the desired sample for this study, simple random sampling procedure was applied. The researcher obtained 30% of principals, BOM members and

teachers while Krejcie and Morgan Table of Samples, (1970) was used to determine the students' sample. A total of 26 principals, 104 B.O.Ms, 183 teachers and 370 students participated in the study as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Population Sample Frame

Category of Respondents	Population	Sample
Principal	84	26
B.O.M.	336	104
Teachers	610	183
Students	10,225	370

#### VI. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The researchers made use of theoretical framework and literature review to develop a questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. Questionnaire is an instrument for data collection used where the researcher is looking for differences in responses across groups of people (Screiber, & Asner- Self, 2011). The researcher picked on questionnaires because they do not consume a lot of time and promote anonymity. The respondents answered the questionnaires at their own convenience since the researcher used drop and pick method.

There questionnaires were based on a five-point likert scale and there were questionnaires for principals, questionnaires for B.O.M members, questionnaires for teachers and questionnaires for students. The researcher personally delivered the questionnaires to the respondents. The questionnaires had five sections labeled A, B, C, D, and E. The first part required demographic information, the second part required the respondents' perception on the use of various conflict management strategies in their school and part E required information on the existence of conflict in the schools. All the questions were closed-ended.

### VII. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF INSTRUMENTS

Reliability is the extent to which instruments yield consistent responses over time while validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Oso & Onen, 2009). The instruments were validated by experts at the

university while reliability was ensured by piloting the questionnaire to a sample of 4 principals, 8 B.O.M. Members, 20 teachers and 80 students from 4 public secondary schools purposively selected within the research are but not included in the main sample. The reliability of the instrument was obtained using SPSS version22 and a Cronbach Alpha reliability Coefficient of **0.876** was found as shown in the table below. The instrument was reliable based on recommendations by Orodho (2008) that a reliable questionnaire should have alpha coefficient of 0.7 and above.

Table 2: Reliability

Reliability Statistics				
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. Items	of	
.861	0.878		5	

#### VIII. STATISTICAL TREATMENT OF DATA

The researcher first pre-processed data to correct the errors identified in the raw data such as by eliminating of unclear and inconsistent answers and then developed a coding scheme that guided further analysis (Kombo & Tromp, 2009). This study generated quantitative data from the questionnaires administered. The data was analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data and results were presented in frequency tables, bar graphs, means and percentages.

#### IX. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researcher used descriptive statistics to determine the mean rating of principals, BOMS, students and teachers' perceptions on the four conflict management strategies, (competing, collaboration, avoidance, and compromising) used to manage conflicts in public secondary schools in Kenya.

The results of the study revealed that collaboration conflict management strategy (CMS) was the highly preferred strategy of resolving conflicts in secondary schools in Kenya as shown by mean rating of 3.6 below, while competing, avoidance and compromising was rated 2.1, 1.6 and 2.4 respectively (table 3).

Table 3: Shows overall means ratings for each conflict management strategies

Strategies	Principal	B.O.M	Teachers	Student	Overall Mean
Competing	2.1	2.2	1.9	2.2	2.1
Collaboration	3.9	3.4	3.9	3.3	3.6
Avoidance	1.4	2.1	1.7	1.3	1.6
Compromising	2.2	2.5	2.2	2.6	2.4

Principals and teachers strongly agree that collaboration conflict management strategy is the preeminent strategy to curb conflicts in our Kenya secondary schools as indicated by a mean of 3.9. Both BOM and students on the other hand agreed that collaboration conflict management is the preferred strategy for resolving conflicts in schools as shown by their mean ratings of 3.4 and 3.3 respectively.

The study therefore concludes that collaboration conflict management style can avert school unrests and improve students' academic performance. This finding is in concurrence with Kalagbor and Nnokam (2015). They posit that collaboration is the best approach to conflict management in schools. They also reiterate that the CMS strategy is associated with positive outcomes. Ghaffar et al. (2012) concur

and add that collaboration CMS is the most preferred strategy and works well. Schools whose principals have embraced collaboration conflict management strategy in conflict management, unrests are unheard of. Higher application of collaborative approach to conflict management translates to calmness in the school, positive behavior, minimum conflicts and high academic performance.

Collaboration encompasses high employment of good communication, concern for others and an environment for discussion. Good communication, a characteristic of CMS is about a concern for others and cuts administrative conflicts and energies. Lack of proper communication channels has been mentioned severally as a cause of conflict in public secondary schools (Infotrak, 2016, Okoth et al. 2016). Good communication reduces chances of conflicts, enhances school climate, hence absence of unrests.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established that collaboration conflict management strategy is the solution to the problems in the Kenyan public secondary schools. Good performance is evidence of positive school climate. In a positive school environment, everyone is valued, cared for and given a chance to be heard, there are no destructive group behaviours like unrests and/or arsons.

The Ministry of Education (MoE), through the Commission for University Education (CUE) needs to in-cooperate curriculum conflict education in their training to prepare teachers and principals for the task ahead of dealings with all types of conflicts

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