



**DETERMINING CAUSES OF CONFLICTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND THEIR
INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN KISUMU CITY, KENYA**

Okoth, Elizabeth, A., M.Edu and Dr. Yambo, Onyango J. M., PhD.

Department of Educational Administration and Planning and Economics, Kisii University,
Kisumu Campus Kenya

Abstract: Conflict management strategies are fundamental to peaceful coexistence in any organization. Conflicts are inevitable, and can spring from miscommunication, unmet expectations, and feelings that one's contributions has not been acknowledged: in fact conflicts seldom have a simple cause. The objective of this article was to determine the causes of conflicts in secondary schools and their influence on students' academic achievement in Kisumu city, Kenya. Guided by the contingency theory of management, the study was conducted through cross sectional survey research design. Data was collected by the researcher from 382 students and 265 teachers in secondary schools in Kisumu city, using questionnaires and interview techniques. Data was analyzed using percentages, means and standard deviations, and reported in tables and figures. The findings were that the main cause of conflict was personality differences 191 (51.57%) as reported by the respondents. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education and the TSC conduct regular management training seminars to educate teachers on the verity of conflict management strategies and their strengths and weaknesses as well as where and when they can be used.

Keywords: Kenya, Causes, Conflict, Secondary, Schools, Impediments.

Introduction: From time immemorial, conflicts have been in existence. Studies done by Yambo (2012) found out that conflicts and stressful situations are closely associated to an extent that they can influence principals' work and service

delivery in schools. Further, the work of Aldag and Kuzuhara (2002) added that conflict is an old phenomenon and in fact as old as mankind and these days have been causing concerns to all stakeholders in education and other employers alike. Over time, the causes of conflicts have diversified, and their types have also grown in complexity (Whetten & Cameron, 2002). Conflict is actual or perceived opposition of needs. In politics, conflict refers to wars, revolutions or other struggles, which may involve the use of force as in armed conflicts.

For Correspondence:

yambojm@gmail.com

Received on: March 2016

Accepted after revision: April 2016

Downloaded from: www.johronline.com

According to McNamara (2007) conflicts occur when two or more parties, with perceived incompatible goals, seek to undermine each other's goal-seeking capability. In fact, clash of interests, values, opinions, actions or directions often spark conflicts in every work place schools included. This study regards conflict as a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests; or incompatibility or opposition, either within an entity or between entities that eventually mars academic achievement in secondary schools. The work of Mudis and Yambo (2015) contends that it is prudent to properly manage conflicts by using various means including guidance and counseling which every school should endeavor to make effective. This is because without proper social arrangement or resolution, conflicts can result into stress, unnecessary fatigue or tensions among stakeholders (Yambo, Odhiambo and Odera 2014). When conflicts occur, their effects are often broader than the individuals involved, and can affect many associated individuals and relationships, in more or less adverse ways. In this regards, it can affect school fraternity and academic achievement. Hence, the need to effectively manage conflicts is a requirement for the proper functioning of any individual, group or organization.

According Aldag and Kuzuhara (2002) conflict management is distinct from conflict resolution in schools. The latter refers to resolving a dispute to the approval of one or both parties, and the former to an ongoing process that may never have a resolution. There are several types of conflicts and the knowledge of the types is a prerequisite for effective management of conflicts especially in school environment. Studies done by Gross and Guerrero (2000) and Yambo *et al.* (2014) contended that it is not possible to manage conflicts if the type of the conflict is not first identified and addressed. Whereas the rate of conflicts has increased in secondary schools in Kisumu city, the actual type of conflicts experienced in the schools have

not been identified. This therefore, could hinder effective management of the conflicts in these schools. Since there is no one best way to deal with conflicts in schools, Aldag and Kuzuhara (2002) however, suggests that the best method depends on the situation, but generally, there are five basic ways of dealing with conflicts which they identify as avoidance, collaboration, accommodation, competition and compromise. The same methods have also been advanced by McNamara (2010) who found them useful in work situations. According to Omollo, Kute and Yambo (2016) the key to managing social and financial conflicts in schools well is choosing and executing the strategy that best fits the situation. This has been found that each person or groups of workers tend to use one or two of the above five strategies more than the others, though some people predominantly use one approach than other approaches when in conflict situations. Thus Principals, teachers and students should be skilled to be able to understand interpersonal conflict situations and use the appropriate conflict management strategy for each situation appropriately. Therefore, this study aims at identifying and determining the causes of conflicts in secondary schools and their influence on students' academic achievement in Kisumu city, Kenya.

Statement of the problem

Schools are learning environments which need peace and silent atmosphere as intended ideals. Conflicts are inevitable hence cannot miss where people are and coexist. Kisumu city has been noted to be having high levels of conflict in secondary schools. The prevalent conflicts being student-student conflict, teacher - teacher conflict and teacher-student conflict and sometimes church-school or sponsor/school conflict. Despite the government efforts to curb this menace by training guidance and counseling teachers and accepting pastoral and chaplaincy services in schools. Conflict has been an elusive matter. The effect of unmanaged conflict is expensive to our society as a whole. The researchers therefore have purposed to determine causes of conflicts in

secondary schools and their influence on students' academic achievement in Kisumu City, Kenya.

Causes of Conflicts in Secondary Schools

According to Robbins (2000), conflict does not appear out of the thin air. It has causes. These causes can be managed consciously and unconsciously that is positively or negatively. Studies done by Achoka (1990) posited that one of the causes of school conflicts has been school structural factors. For instance, the size of the school correlates with the amount of disputes. That is the larger the school, the greater the number of differences and the higher the degree of conflict intensify (Yambo 2012). School bureaucratic characteristics like the degree of specialization correlates with conflict. While people like educators are dissatisfied or cannot realize their status aspirations, they can compensate for it by fostering discord within the school. The work of Yambo and Tuitoek (2014) found that interest groups with different goals will run into differences at times especially when competing for meager resources and wanting to attain positions of influence and decision making. Situations that at times, get provoked by different, divergent perspective among stakeholders also bring about conflict. According to Plunkett (2009) competition can take the form of two individuals trying to outperform each other. As much as competition has been found to be healthy by Omollo *et al.* (2016) for it brings out creativity, on the other hand, competition can also erupt over a struggle for a scarce commodity. This could lead not only to lack of co-operation but to open conflicts as well. Some of the conflicts experienced in schools sometimes emanate from leadership of the principals, BoM chairpersons or student leaders (Mudis& Yambo 2015).

Studies done by Deutsch (2000) opined that since people have different personalities, this has often resulted in them doing things differently, which has been deemed to be normal. These diverse personalities could create the potential for conflict among the people concerned. According

to Mondy, Sharplin and Premaux (2010) and the work done by Mudis& Yambo (2015) stipulates that personality difference mean the characteristics of a person and the way in which he/she express him/herself which clashes with that of other people. These people tend to blame others for their miseries. Some of the divergent personality types are stubborn, argumentative, complaining, non – assertive, and highly emotional and so on. It is very crucial for a school to have strategies in place to manage conflicts arising from personality difference.

According to Achoka (1990) communication problems may also cause conflict. The difficulties involved include noise, semantic differences and insufficient exchange of information. Any distortion of information of either the sender or the recipient may cause unnecessary conflict in a school set up or any organization. The work of Plunkett (2009), share these sentiments by saying that communication is seldom perfect, and imperfect communication may result in misperception, interpretation and misunderstanding. Due to the fact that the receiver may not be listening actively, he/she may simply misunderstand the sender. The results can be a disagreement about the goals, roles, or intentions. Sometimes information is withheld intentionally, for personal gain or to embarrass a colleague.

Research done by Robbins (2000) says that conflicts can evolve out of the individual who idolizes personal value systems. The chemistry between some people makes it hard for them to work together. According to Aldag and Kuzuhara (2002); Gross and Guerrero (2000) and Yambo (2012) individual conflicts are often associated with factors such as background, education, experience, and training mould each individual into a unique personality with a particular set of values. The result is people who may be perceived by others as abrasive, untrustworthy, strange, or difficult to work with. These personal differences can create conflict.

Research Methodology: The study was conducted in Kisumu city in Kisumu County

of Kenya. This study was conducted through a cross sectional survey research design as an overall strategy. According to Oso and Onen (2009) surveys are descriptive studies concerned with descriptions, recording, analyses and interpretations of conditions that either exists or that once existed. Surveys deal with descriptions of phenomena as they are, as they were or as they may be. Studies by Saunders, Philip and Thornbill (2003) posited that surveys do not manipulate variables nor arrange for events to happen, but focuses only on conditions or relations that exist, opinions held, processes that are going on, effects that are evident or trends that are developing (Kothari 2006).

The target population for this study comprised 845 teachers and 7054 students in the 52 public and private secondary schools in Kisumu city distributed as indicated in Table 1.

Sampling Procedure

The sample comprised 382 students’ and 265 teachers in 52 secondary schools in Kisumu city. The sample was determined according to recommendation of Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), who recommends a sample of 265 for a population of 845 which is 30% and is considered to be statistically significant and since there are only 52 secondary schools in the city, all were purposively sampled.

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Schools Category</i>					<i>Sample</i>
	<i>Private</i>	<i>Public</i>			<i>Pop</i>	
		<i>National</i>	<i>Provincial</i>	<i>District</i>		
<i>Schools</i>	12	0	10	30	52	52
<i>Teachers</i>	51	0	83	131	845	265
<i>Students</i>	78	0	91	213	7054	382

The work of Saunders *et al.* (2003) recommends a sample of 382 for a population of 7054 based on their table of large samples

This study collected qualitative and quantitative data using questionnaires and interview techniques from students and teachers from private and public secondary schools in Kisumu city. According to Kilmann (1976) specifically, the study adopted Thomas-Kilmann conflict management questionnaire which is a standard questionnaire for determining the type of conflict management strategies used by people. Thomas-Kilmann Questionnaire was useful because it had already been standardized, and because this study measured the type of conflict management strategies which was what the instrument is designed to measure. Quantitative data on conflict management strategies adopted were collected using the Thomas-Kilmann conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), which was the most widely used questionnaire of its type in both research and management training. It consists of 30 forced-choice questions from which respondents choose between two paired statements, each describing one of the five

conflicts styles included in the managerial grid. First, respondents are asked to consider situations in which they find their wishes differ from those of other persons. they choose from the two paired statements the one that is more characteristic of their behavioral response. Using the score sheet with columns labeled competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding and accommodating, the participants’ answers that correspond to their answers on the questionnaire are circled. The range of possible scores for each style is form 0 (For very low Use) to 12 (for very high use). Scoring the TKI is accomplished by totaling the number of items circled in each column. Graphing the items in relation to the scores of managers who have already taken the TKI yields a profile of conflict management skills a person uses in conflicts situations. The tool assesses assertiveness and cooperativeness as determined by (a) accommodating (b) avoiding (c) collaborating (d) competing (e) compromising strategies of managing conflicts. Interviews were person to person verbal communication in which one person (or group of persons) asks the other person (or group of

persons) questions intended to elicit responses for the purposes of gathering information (Best & Kahn 2006). The study employed key informants interviews to collect qualitative data from head teachers. Key informants interviews are interviews conducted on individuals that have the requisite information on a one-on-one basis. The head teachers by virtue of their position and experience, held information that other teachers did not have. Their views were crucial to this study since they are responsible for management of conflicts in their schools

Validity is the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Oso&Onen, 2009). Validity was ensured through use of experienced graduate research supervisors of Kisii University. The questionnaires and interview guides were given to the two supervisors to evaluate and rate each item in relation to the objectives as not relevant or relevant on the 1-4 scale. Content validity index was then be determined from the assessors agreement scale as $n_{3/4}/N$, where $n_{3/4}$ is the number of items marked 3 or 4 both supervisors, and N the total number of items assessed. The items were modified until a validity index of at least .70 is attained. An index of .70 is the least accepted value of validity in research (Best & Kahn 2006). The study reported a validity index of 0.824. This means that at least eight out of ten items actually measured what they were intended to measure. This study collected and analyzed quantitative data. Quantitative data was analyzed using percentages, means and standard deviations with the help of SPSS, and presented in tables and figures. Percentages were used to analyze demographic data and to describe the frequencies of the type of conflicts and strategies of conflict management.

The study ensured that participants were well informed of the intentions of the study, and that they participated in the study from a point of information. The researcher also ensured that data collected was analyzed professionally and that it was not fudged to conform to some predetermined opinion. Further, to protect the

respondents' identities, data was reported as a pool instead of highlighting individual cases. The researcher obtained all the necessary permits from the university, the district education and as well as from the head teachers, to ensure that the study did not contravene any ethical requirement. Further, the researcher ensured that all information provided was treated with utmost privacy and confidentiality, and that no information was released to third parties without permission from the source.

Results and Discussions

The study further investigated the causes of conflicts in secondary schools in Kisumu city. This was guided by the theory that if conflicts have to be managed or reduced in the schools, then their causes must first of all be known. To achieve this objective, the respondents were required to rank the factors that are usually at play when they find themselves in conflicting situations. Six factors were identified and ranked as indicated in table 2.

Table 2 reveal six main causes of conflicts in secondary schools in Kisumu city. The study established that the common causes of conflict are competition, incompatibility of needs and interests, miscommunication, unmet expectations, personality differences, and contradictory opinions among the respondents. The most common cause of conflicts was unmet expectations which was 103 (27.81%) of respondents while next was contradictory opinions which was 162 (43.74%) of respondents. The personality differences 191 (51.57%) of the respondents which was supported by Mondy *et al.* (2010) that personality clashes are normally experienced in work place. Also, miscommunication was 121(32.67) of respondents as was alluded by Achoka (1990). The other common cause of conflicts in schools was incompatibility of needs and interests was 136(36.72%) of respondents and lastly was competition (25.92%) of respondents.

Table 2 Ranking of the Causes of Conflict in Secondary Schools in Kisumu city

Cause of Conflict	Rank												Total	
	1 st		2 nd		3 rd		4 th		5 th		6 th			
	N	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Competition	53	14.31	68	18.36	44	11.88	49	13.23	52	14.04	96	25.92	362	100.00
Incompatibility of needs and Interests	41	11.07	52	14.04	49	8.37	31	36.32	136	36.72	53	14.31	362	100.00
Miscommunication	58	15.66	21	5.67	30	8.10	121	32.67	78	21.06	54	14.56	362	100.00
Unmet Expectations	103	27.81	38	10.26	24	6.48	60	16.20	71	19.17	66	17.82	362	100.00
Personality Differences	83	22.41	21	5.67	191	51.57	59	15.93	10	2.7	0	0.00	362	100.00
Contradictory Opinions	24	7.09	162	43.74	24	7.29	42	11.34	15	4.05	95	25.65	362	100.00
Total	362		362		362		362		362		362		2172	

The study therefore established that the causes of conflicts in secondary schools were (i) unmet expectations, (ii) contradictory opinions among opinions, (iii) personality differences, (iv) miscommunication, (v) incompatibility of needs and interests, and (vi) competition, in that order.

Conclusions: The study established that the most common types of conflicts in secondary schools in Kisumu city were interpersonal conflicts, intrapersonal conflicts, emotional conflicts, and group conflicts. The study also established that the main causes of conflicts in secondary schools in Kisumu city were unmet expectations, contradictory opinions, personality differences, miscommunication, incompatibility of needs and interests, and competition in that order.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission conduct regular management training seminars to educate teachers on the verity of conflict management strategies and their strengths and weaknesses as well as where and when they can be used. Otherwise, the tendency to rely on a few techniques for all situations will continue and this is not healthy for the schools.

Reference

- Achoka, J. (1990). *Conflict Resolution: The need for virtuosity*. Education Canada
- Aldag, R. J. & Kuzuhara, L. W. (2002). *Organizational behavior and management: An integrated skills approach*. Cincinnati, OH: South-Western Thomson Learning.
- Best, W. J. & Kahn, V. J. (2006) *Research in Education*. Tenth Edit. Prentice Hall, Pearson.
- Bloomberg, L. D. & Volpe M.(2008). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end*. California, Thousand Oaks. Sage publishers.
- Deutsch, M. (2000). Justice and Conflict.in M. Deutsch and P. Coleman, (Eds.). *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory*

and Practice. San Francisco :Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Gross M.A & Guerrero, L.K (2000). *Managing conflict appropriately and effectively: An application of the competence model to Rahim's organizational conflict styles*. The International Journal of conflict management.
- Kilmann.T. (1976).*Analyze your conflict management style: the Thomas Kilmann instrument and crisis early warning systems*. Lanham, MD.Rowman and Littlefield.Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Kothari,C R. (2006) *Research methodology, method and techniques New age International Interethnic Coexistence*.New York: Continuum Publishing Co.
- McNamara, C. (2007). *Field guide to leadership and supervision*.Authenticity consulting, LLC. Mondy, R.W., Sharplin & Premaux, S.R (2010) *Management concepts, practices, and skills*. 5th Ed. Massachusetts: Simon and Schuster, Inc.
- Mudis, P. A. & Yambo, J.M.O. (2015). Role of Peer Counseling on the Relationship between Prefects and the Students' body in public Secondary schools in Migori Sub-county, Migori County, Kenya *International journal of Academic Research in Progressive education and Development* 4(4):136-149
- Omollo, H. O., Kute, R. A. &Yambo, J. M. O. (2016) Effects of Financial Budgeting in the Management of Public Secondary Schools in Uriiri Sub-County, Migori County, Kenya *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational Sciences* ISSN 2056-58524 (2)1-7
- Oso L. &Onen, H (2009) *Writing Research Proposal And Report*: Nairobi, JKF Plunkett, G. H.(2009)*Management: Meeting and exceeding customer expectations*, 6th Ed. Cincinnati Ohio: South Western College Publishers

- Saunders M., Philip L. & Thornbill, A.(2003); *Research methods for Business students, third edition.*
- UN. (2000). Human Rights Today: A United Nations Priority. The United Nations.<http://www.un.org/rights/HRToday/>]
- Van Der Westhuizen, P.C (1991). *Effective educational management*.3rd Ed Pretoria.
- Whetten, D. A., & Cameron, K. S. (2002). *Developing management skills*, (5thed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Yambo, J.M.O. (2012) *Determinants of KCSE Examination Performance in SDA Sponsored Schools: A Key to Academic Promotion to the next Level of Learning.* Lambert Academic Publishing. Saarbrucken, Germany
- Yambo, J. M. O., Odhiambo, R. A. & Odera, Y. F. (2014).An Assessment of the Extent at which High School Principals are Stressed in relation to their Job Experience in Schools in Southern Nyanza Region, Kenya. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention ISSN (Online): 2319 – 7722*, www.ijhssi.org3 (5) 25-33
- Yambo, J.M.O. & Tuitoek J.K.F. (2014).Effects of the Principals' Decision Making in the Management of Private Secondary Schools in Kisumu District, Kenya *International journal of Academic Research in Progressive education and Development* 3(4):52-60