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The Nature of Conflicts and Discipline Issues Encountered in Public Secondary Schools in Kakamega County, Kenya

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Abstract:

The study sought to investigate the nature of conflicts and discipline issues encountered in public secondary schools in Kakamega County. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The study population was 417 schools. The respondents included principals, teachers, and education officers, members of the Boards of management, support staff and students. Both probability and non-probability sampling designs were used as well as primary and secondary data collection techniques. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used as tools for data collection. Quantitative data analysis was done using SPSS version 25. Research findings were presented in tables, graphs, and charts. The study found out that a majority of conflicts in public secondary schools in Kakamega County are value-based in nature as well as interest-based and need-based. Apart from that, some conflicts are also structural in nature. The study recommends that schools should strive to understand the nature of conflicts occurring in secondary schools. Future studies should consider applying a different research design to gather as much detailed information as possible.

Keywords: Nature, conflict, discipline issues, public secondary schools

1. Introduction

Conflicts in secondary schools between students and the school administration and even between students themselves leading undesirable students' unrest are not unique and a preserve for Kenya as a county. At the global level, there have been very many cases of student unrest, an issue which has raised great concern at the social, racial, geographical and political spectrum. For many years, teaching methods have carried the blame, with some scholars arguing that this is the main reason for increased students' indiscipline. Whereas the parents suffer anxiety and frustrations, the increased rates of violence and restlessness facts the students' social and academic journey. The administration is also affected as the chaos demand reconstruction of buildings and transfer of staff. In some cases, both students and staff have become victims of the violent actions, with some being injured and some losing their lives. The economic damage that takes place is also magnificent (Alizadeh, 2011).

The Western countries have not been left behind as far as the indiscipline of students is concerned. The media has covered many instances of students' unrest, with different teachers' organizations complaining that their children are not stable at school. As a result, researchers have invested in extensive studies to analyse the reality of the matter, focusing on the extent of the unrest in high schools (Esen, 1998). For the years 2004, 1996 and 1990, of the Scottish Executive Education Department, which is an independent group conducted studies in secondary schools, with an aim of examining the nature school unrests, and how they change over time. The questions remained the same, and the data was collected in the same schools with teachers as the respondents in all the studies. The results of the study indicated that the unrests have remained a major concern in secondary schools. The measures put in place had not managed to help in reduction of the chaos (Munn, Johnstone and Sharp, 2004).

Guidance and counselling programmes were introduced in secondary schools in Kenya on the grounds that it would shape the general character, traits, attitude and discipline of the learners (Wango, 2006). It would, also, enhance the academic, social and personal development of the students. The programme for guidance and counselling was also cited as aimed at aiding the students to make achievable career choices and decisions. However, the realization of the expected purpose of these programmes is still in doubt given the existence of indiscipline cases in public secondary schools in Kakamega County. Guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools have either been misrepresented, given divided attention than it deserves, handled by incompetent personnel, inadequacy of resources to execute the programmes, or the programmes have been shelved hence not in practice (Wango, 2006). Most schools in

Kakamega County, have guidance and counselling departments. However, conflicts are on the rise as evidenced by school violence, divisions among students, student incitement, long standing differences between teachers and learners, teenage pregnancies, drug and substance abuse and marijuana (bhang) smoking. For example, in 2018, restless students in Makhokho Boys and St. Mary's Girls Mumias set school property within their schools on fire. The inspection reports by the County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer in Kakamega attributed the unrests to students' abuse of drugs and substance abuse by students of both gender (QAS Assessment Report, 30th June, 2018) It is against this background that this study sought to investigate the efficacy of guidance and counselling programmes in managing conflict in public secondary schools in Kakamega County.

2. Literature Review

Conflict is a social phenomenon in which individuals, groups, organizations, and nations disagree with one another. Conflict arises when an individual or a group understands that others are negatively influencing and impeding their interests (Amason et al., 1996). It happens for a variety of reasons, including conflicts and inconsistencies during interpersonal encounters. A conflict is also a purposeful act intended to thwart achievement in accomplishing objectives (Robbins, 2000). Conflict is defined as a negative situation and a process, as can be observed from the definitions. Conflict is a two-dimensional dynamic process that involves both parties.

The terms 'guidance and counselling' have been interpreted differently around the world. They are defined by Makinde (1987) as a technique in which a vulnerable person and in need of advice interacts with a counsellor who is trained and certified to provide all the assistance, with the goal of assisting the victim in learning to deal more effectively with themselves and the realities of the environment. In the 1920s and 1930s, society came up with the concept of progressive counselling. From its inception until the 1950s, education and training were the principal supervision points in a school setting, owing to the industrial revolution and World War II. Counsellors and professors alike were concerned with preparing children for life after high school (Muro & Kottman, 1995).

From a guidance standpoint, this meant directing students into vocations that best suited their strengths and objectives. Developmental mentoring had evolved by the 1950s to include the shaping of pupils' attitudes and behaviors. Children's mental health and emotional well-being were given more attention. By the late 1960s, the school counsellor's position had taken on its contemporary form. Guidance has evolved to include counselling, planning, placement, reference, and consulting in its current form (Schmidt, 1993).

Since the country's independence in 1963, various government reports have recommended providing counselling services to students in academic institutions. The Ominde Report, published in 1964, proposed that learners be provided education and training courses that are most appropriate for their needs (Ajowi & Simatwa, 2010). Learners should also be given career and employment counselling, according to the report. As a result, the Guidance and Counselling Unit was formed at the independent monitoring head office, Jogoo House 'B', in 1971. The Group was tasked with dealing with issues of psychological maladjustment among students in schools and conducting vocational guidance seminars for teachers.

According to this Report, guidance was not a necessity of the usual tasks of instructors (Ajowi & Simatwa, 2010). In 1976, Gachathi chaired the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies, which found that pupils' adequate guiding, counselling, and learning had a key part in improving the pupil's future adaptability. As a result of this report, all teachers should participate in guidance and counselling as part of their regular teaching obligations.

It also suggested that guidance and counselling be combined with other themes like ethics, careers, dispute resolution, human relations, family life, and sex education (Ngumi et al., 2007). The Presidential Working Group on Education and Manpower Training (Kamunge Report, 1988) stated that guidance and counselling of secondary school students were critical in assisting them in identifying their desires and requirements. It is recommended that advice and counselling be dispersed to the regional level (Lutomia & Sikolia, 2008).

3. Methodology

A descriptive survey design was adopted to examine the nature of conflicts in secondary schools in Kakamega County. This is because descriptive investigations are not just limited to factual discoveries. Still, they can also lead to the development of key concepts of knowledge and the resolution of critical problems (Creswell, 2014). Findings and inquiries were made using a descriptive approach, which is based on the collection of data. The current strategies used to manage conflicts in secondary schools. This design also enabled classification, measurement, analysis, and comparison to gathering data: According to Kombo and Tromp (2006), descriptive research is aimed to gather information on the current occurrence and, if possible, derive valid general conclusions from the facts discussed. The researcher administered a test to accomplish this goal, through the use of interviews and questionnaires to gather as much information as possible.

The study was conducted in Kakamega county, formerly the Western Province of Kenya. Despite the expansive nature of the County, the Study covered all the twelve (12) Sub Counties unreservedly. The Study covered the following categories of public secondary schools: boys boarding, girls boarding, mixed boarding, mixed day, boys' day, girls' day, girls boarding and day, boys boarding and day, and mixed boarding and day secondary schools. Kakamega County was selected because it is one of the counties with an increased number of indiscipline cases, especially the strikes between 2018 and 2020. Besides, Kakamega County has a large number of both urban and rural schools. Therefore, it provided a good room for looking at factors that affect the efficacy of guidance and counselling programs in urban and rural settings. The study targeted all the four hundred and seventeen (417) public secondary schools in Kakamega County (CDE Office, 2020), all school Principals and teachers in these schools, Heads of department / Deputy Principals, education officers and

officers from the Teachers' Service Commission at the County level, Boards of Management, Parents Associations, non-teaching staff, and class prefects and Form Three students from Kakamega County secondary schools.

Mugenda and Mugenda (2009) define sampling as a process of selecting the number of individuals to represent a larger group of subjects. To determine the sample size from a larger population the formula used by Kombo and Tromp (2006) is presented as shown below:

$$S = \frac{N(CV^2)}{CV^2 + (N - 1)e^2}$$

Where:

S = Desired sample

N = Population

CV = Coefficient of variation (set at 0.1)

e = Tolerance at desired level of confidence (set at 0.5 at 95% confidence level).

The researcher used a combination of both probability and non-probability sampling designs. Simple random sampling (probability) to identify the schools. All categories of public secondary schools in Kakamega County were put into stratified groups depending on whether the schools are Boys, Girls, Mixed, Day and Boarding. Kakamega County has four hundred and seventeen (417) public secondary schools. Simple random sampling was then used to pick 20% of schools from all the school categories. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2009), a sample should be in a range of 10%-30%.

Simple random sampling was further used to pick one student from each Form Three class totaling to four hundred and seventeen (417) students. The researcher then grouped them into focus groups for Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Further, one Form Three class teacher and one prefect from each school were also randomly selected and a questionnaire administered to them. Simple Random Sampling was also used to pick one non-teaching staff per school.

Purposive Sampling is useful when there is a need to limit the sample to cases that are likely to be 'information rich' with respect to the study. Thus, Purposive Sampling will enable the researcher to sample specific persons in positions of responsibility. Therefore, Purposive Sampling was used to select the school principals, the County Director of Education (CDE), the County Director Teacher Management (CDTM), County Commissioner, Board of Management (BOM) and non-teaching staff members. These respondents have specific important information pertaining to school management that will enhance the study findings. In total, the sample comprised of three hundred and sixty-four (364) respondents.

4. Results

From the findings, the nature of conflicts in public secondary schools in Kakamega County include valued-based, interest-based, need-based, and to some extent, structural-based.

4.1. Value-Based Conflicts

To find out the nature and types of conflict in public secondary schools in Kakamega County, respondents were asked to state if the conflicts occurring in their schools are value-based in nature, that is, if they were caused by factors such as religion, language, behaviour, attitude, kinship and lifestyle.

From the findings, 8.1% (18) of the respondents strongly agreed that the conflicts occurring in their schools are value-based in nature; 38.9% (86) of the respondents somehow agreed to this; and 32.1% (71) agreed. In total, 79.1% of the respondents felt that the conflicts occurring in their schools are value-based in nature. On the other hand, a cumulative of 18.4% of the respondents disagreed that the conflicts occurring in their schools are value-based in nature.

4.2. Interest-Based Conflicts

The study also sought to know if the conflicts occurring in school are interest-based in nature, that is, if they are caused by factors such as need for proper accommodation and more infrastructure. From the findings in table 4.7, 11.2% (26) of the respondents highly agreed that the conflicts occurring in school are interest-based in nature; 33.3% (81) of the respondents somehow agreed to this; while 27.4% (71) of the respondents agreed to this. Cumulatively, 71.9% of the respondents agreed that indeed, conflicts occurring in school are interest-based in nature. On the other hand, 25.9% of the respondents felt that conflicts occurring in schools are not interest-based in nature. These findings therefore indicate that indeed, conflicts in schools emanate from some of the most obvious quest for basic fulfilments.

4.3. Need-Based Conflicts

The study also sought to find out if the conflicts occurring in schools are needs based in nature, that is, they are caused by life basics factors such as food, security, freedom, and water. From the findings in table 4.7, 8.1% (15) of the respondents strongly agreed that conflicts occurring in schools are needs based in nature; 29.3% (79) of the respondents somehow agreed to this; while 24.9% (66) agreed to this. Cumulatively, 62.3% of the respondents felt that conflicts occurring in schools are needs based in nature, that is, they are caused by life basics factors such as food, security, freedom, and water. On the other hand, 28.7% of the respondents did not think that conflicts occurring in schools are needs based in nature.

From the field interviews, one key informant, when asked to state the nature of conflict occurring in schools, stated that: 'Okay number one, we have the conflicts between the student and the parent whereby the two, parent is like neglecting their children let me put it that way such that they are not really in touch with this child. And hence the child does things according to he or she thinks is right because there is that lack of parental guidance. Yeah, and many of the

issues they have emanates from home. I think that is the main one. And then another conflict of course is that '*mtoto ametoka nyumbani*' he is in school and because at home the parent is not very serious with the child, so as teacher when you want to correct this child, it becomes a bit tricky simply because the child is seeing like at home no one is bothered about me so what do you expect of me you as the teacher? It becomes tricky and it brings a form of conflict between the teacher and the learner' (Head of Guidance and Counselling, 2021).

Reactions from the key informants also show that the type of schools the learners goes through also determine the type of conflict as one key informant stated; Okay this being a mixed school, some of the conflicts we experience are relationships between the girls and the boys. We have lost most of the girls due to pregnancies. Some have also dropped out of school and gotten married, sometimes they are married by the boys who dropped out from other schools, sometimes they married to bodaboda riders. Then we have also had a few cases of drug abuse (Head of Guidance and Counselling, 2021).

On the nature of conflict in schools, one principal reacted that 'Yeah maybe there are conflicts on small things, sometimes it over 'I have lost my pen, I have lost my money, you did this, you took my water.' Small things make them have conflicts amongst themselves because sometimes somebody is making noise, when the other ones tell them to keep quiet, they react, they start conflicting, they start quarrelling so normally small things make them have these conflicts' (Principal, 2021).

4.4. Structural-Based Conflicts

The study also sought to find out if the conflicts occurring in schools are structural-based in nature, that is, they are caused by factors such as leadership change. From the findings, 21.7% (48) of the respondents strongly disagreed that conflicts occurring in schools are structural-based in nature; 9.7% (17) of the respondents somehow disagreed while 17.6% (39) disagreed to this. Cumulatively, 48.7% of the respondents felt that conflicts occurring in schools are structural-based in nature. On the other hand, 49.3% of the respondents agreed that conflicts occurring in schools are structural-based in nature.

As the findings indicate, while some respondents felt that conflicts occurring in schools are structural-based in nature, that is, they are caused by factors such as leadership change, a majority of the respondents disagreed with this. This means that while conflicts might emanate from the structural settings within the school, this is not the major cause of conflicts in schools.

Findings from the interviews also show that conflicts within schools are structural in nature. As one respondent stated, 'If we are talking about school administration, then conflicts are that parents support their children in doing wrong whenever a teacher wants to make some maybe punishment the parent feels that the child is being punished unduly. Yeah, there is a bit of that and also the general socio-economic/constraints, they make the children to know how to make money, out there when they come to school, they have every flimsy excuse of how to get out of school and also, they indulge themselves in crime, they sell drugs in school and girls also sell their bodies as sex workers amongst the people in the community so when the teachers want to intervene, there is no one the community is against the teachers. Yeah, that kind of behaviour' (Head of Guidance and Counselling, 2021).

While some respondents felt that there existed conflicts between learners and the administration, others felt that there wasn't much conflict between the two. As one stated 'We don't have much conflicts, the only thing that will come up with is, for example they would come and say; we want game skits; our classes have no glasses or window panes, cold and all that. I think those are the only issues they have and to us those are normal issues and many other times we have addressed them in the same spectre we encourage them to hold on. All there are money oriented. What they require, requires money and that means we always encourage them to hold on when money comes in that is the administration encouraging them, when money comes in then all their requests are sorted out and apart from that we don't have those extreme cases where students are in conflict with the administration' (Head of Guidance and Counselling, 2021).

The study also further found out that conflict exists between students and the administration. As one respondent reacted, 'Now, between student and the administration, mostly it is now the administration feeling that the students are not doing the right thing. Otherwise, we have not had major conflicts as such. There are sometimes you find that the students are making noise, we have to go to them and find out what is happening. A few times students would complain maybe sugar was not enough in the porridge, a few times they come and, not really a conflict but small issues. They come and say 'madam on Saturday we missed bread, not everyone got bread.' So, you follow up. As a principal I follow up to know what could have happened. A few times also they can come and complain that teacher so and so is not doing ABCD or teacher so and so waste time. When we hear such then we also act on them' (Principal, 2021).

5. Discussion

The findings are supported by Ghaffar (2011), who opines that the significant factors that cause conflict are varying attitudes, behaving indifferently, and a surge of contradictions. All the factors correlate because they influence each other. Moreover, the nature of conflict solemnly depends on these factors.

This is further supported by Galtung (1996), who maintains that a conflict arises from a complex situation. Conflicts arise from differing points of view between two parties which all claim to have a good decision. Varying thoughts breed low conditions and incompatibilities about the values that matter the most. However, the conflicting parties do not show high resentment towards each other to an extreme degree in all the situations. Unrest in the society between individuals or parties happen on a differential basis, and they bear different negative results (Galtung, 1996).

As research by the Independent Project's Trust (1999) shows that a considerable fraction of the youths usually panic whenever a situation turns as they didn't expect. That leaves them at a difficult point where they ought to distinguish between the valuable and the invaluable functions, materials, and actions. As they mature, they all struggle with finding their identity, accruing the essential resources they need to lead a good life and choosing whether to side-line from substance abuse and alcoholism or follow the latter.

Ntuli (2015) points out that aggressive behaviour that often escalates to a conflict between two parties of either individuals or groups is more often caused by substance abuse, involvement of gangs, or delinquency. The research also pinpoints that most of the violent community members picked the traits from their learning institutions. Most individuals who experienced unrest in their institutions turned to substance abuse, suffered trauma, physical injury, anxiety, and depression. However, the exposure to violence while still young and schooling is treatable through prevention efforts that strive to mediate the situation before it worsens.

The findings agree with Bell's (1992) research that articulated there is high chance of conflict arising in the schools, since they are social institutions. He further notes that conflict occurrence is common in any normal society, of which the school is not an exemption. The primary breed of conflict in society is people having different dire needs, ideas, and materials they value. Any organization that completely lacks a conflict is a clear indication that there is a conflict being suppressed. Conflicts have some pros, primarily associated with the competition and sharing of various thoughts that help the organizations grow exponentially. The research further defines conflict as part of social change, and as long as any community is striving for development, there must arise differing arguments over some issues. Considering such claims, it is nigh impossible to expect the Kenyan academic institutions to lack internal feuds among other rankles between the teachers, students, non-teaching staff, parents, and the surrounding community. However, most disputes in the schools are usually a result of varying thoughts and views between the administration and the teachers, students and the administration or teachers, and the non-teaching staff with the school administration.

Kipkembois and Kipruto (2013) further support the findings, asserting that most students compete for the most basic resources like hostels and good furniture. In the process, they end up conflicting with each other. The results are evident through the students burning the dormitories so that the community builds better institutions for them. The previous literature shows that many students endure the differing opinions that the school administration comes up with (Kihia, 2012). Other students cannot satisfy their personal wishes because the school measures are so stringent not leaving them to try to go against them. The student usually obliges due because they still either have met the required qualifications for the community to deem them fit to control their desires, or the beliefs of the society they reside in cannot affirm a particular mode of conduct. The only option that such students have in situations is quitting the schools to be willing to engage in activities the society deem as social vices and evade the cultural beliefs web that engulfs and forces them into certain sports to acting in a particular manner. According to the student's mind-sets, dropping out of school keeps them in a limitless surrounding environment that does not care about their social conduct and decisions they make so long as they like they are not interfering with any other person's activities. Unfortunately, they might end up in dangerous situations that negatively impact their future lives due to the feeling of alienation caused by loneliness. Kenyan secondary schools are characterized by social vices like drug and substance abuse, truancy, theft, riots, and demonstrations to add on bullying. All the indiscipline activities in the Kenyan high school negatively impact the students' current and future code of conduct. Some of the immediate adverse effects of unrest in institutions include death, physical injuries among students, destruction of properties, increased school dropout, unwanted pregnancies as a result of sexual immorality, and poor academic performance. Rioting is the primary form that the secondary students use to vent their anger whenever they feel like their personal grievances have been neglected by the school administration for so long. Society has neglected for so long the needs of the students to an extent that they deem the most viable method that the concerns can be attended to is through actions via school demonstrations, destruction of properties, and rioting.

Previous findings by Makya and Amasa (2012), in the conflict resolution study that involved the head teachers of schools in Zimbabwe, concluded that the administration is the main cause of conflict in schools. He further explained that the unrest experienced in school is due to the result of the administrations giving a deaf ear to not only the students but also the entire or partial staff, who in turn don't deliver their services to the learners effectively.

From the previous literature, Smith and Laslett (1994) affirm that it is wise to avoid a win or lose situation whenever there arises a conflict in the academic institution. He backs up the claim by outlining how the player always wants the best for their children. Both the parents and the teachers should find an amicable solution whenever there is a misunderstanding t for. Once the row is over, the school and the guardians continue with the previous relationship in striving to help the learners succeed in their academics. The scenario of one party feeling like they dominated during the conflict and won, as a result, harbours the efforts put in by both the parents and the school staff. They act as the school stakeholders in helping the learners realize their full potential and work hard for greater success.

6. Conclusion

The study found out that a majority of conflicts in public secondary schools in Kakamega County are value-based in nature as well as interest-based and need-based. Apart from that, some conflicts are also structural in nature. From the findings, the study concludes that a majority of conflicts in public secondary schools within Kakamega County are caused by value-based factors such as behaviour, attitude, and lifestyle. Besides interests such as need for proper accommodation and needs such as food, freedom and security also result in conflicts. While structural factors such as leadership change might, once in a while, cause chaos, they are not a common form of conflict.

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