

Intervention Measures in Conflict Management in Boarding Secondary Schools in Western Province, Kenya

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Abstract: The use of intervention measures in conflict management is an important element of peaceful running of a secondary school. It assists individuals and groups in better understanding and dealing with conflict as it arises in all aspects of their lives. The purpose of this study was to explore the intervention measures in conflict management in boarding secondary schools in Western Province, Kenya. The descriptive survey research design was used. The population of the study comprised 1602 teachers in 89 public boarding secondary schools in Western Province, Kenya. The respondents comprised teachers in public boarding secondary schools in Western Province. Stratified random sampling was used to select a sample of schools, deputy headteachers and teachers from schools in Western Province. The population was divided into homogeneous subgroups and a simple random sampling in each subgroup was done. Data was collected by use of questionnaires, document analysis and interviews. In order to ascertain content and face validity, the questionnaires and interview schedules were given to experts who matched all the items with the research questions to ascertain whether the instrument actually measured all that it was supposed to measure. The reliability of the instruments was determined through the test retest reliability of the instruments. Data was analyzed by the use of descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentage. Data from in-depth interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The findings showed that the concept of “conflict management” refers to an act and also a process of resolving disputes between two or more parties with the view of coming to a resolution. The significance of the study findings were: to provide greater insight to the administrators of secondary schools on the intervention measures in conflict management in boarding secondary schools. Furthermore, the findings of the study may help education policy makers, managers of schools, headteachers and teachers in providing guidelines on proper use of punishment in conflict management.

Key words: Conflict, discipline, intervention measures, punishment, resolution, violence

INTRODUCTION

A school environment has diverse values, beliefs and attitudes making it inevitable for conflicts to occur among and between students, parents, teachers and staff (Achoka, 1990). The problem with punitive measures of discipline as so used in the past and still being employed today is that they only seem to enhance students’ feeling of dominance by teachers and administrators and consequently create general feeling of distrust. When suspended, for example a student usually develops a desire not to be dominated. Such thoughts may lead a student to create destructive behavior in order to counteract his or her tormenters. Such behavior may lead to setting school buildings on fire as a cathesis; hence thoughts of violence are provoked (Blitz, 2004). Unfortunately, repressive policies and actions exclude and alienate those very students that are most at risk of getting involved in acts of violence. Students tend to view such repressive policies and actions as attempts by the school

management to marginalize them, as violation of their human rights.

It is, therefore, not an aberration to expect conflicts in the administration of secondary schools in Western province. The nature and types of conflicts that occur in secondary school administration vary from one school to another. The common types of conflicts usually occur between the students on one hand and the school authority on the other. Other forms of conflict include interpersonal conflicts among staff as well as the students. Higher levels of conflicts include those that involve the Union of Teachers and the State Government.

Statement of the problem: Strikes, a manifestation of conflict seemed to be increasing in boarding secondary schools in Western Province. For example as already mentioned in 2008, there were over 300 strikes in secondary schools in Kenya in the month of June. These were reported by the media. Maybe others were not reported. Often students punished by suspension,

expulsion, physical/manual labour, stroke of the cane, among others. But the conflicts manifested in strikes do not reduce or end. It is daunting to imagine 300 strikes in one month in a nation.

The foregoing information indicates that managing conflict in secondary schools has been an age-old challenge for educators. Recently, attention has been drawn to the level of violence in secondary schools and society (Ogosa, 2009). If there has to be a positive culture of teaching and learning in the schools, the learning environment must be safe, orderly and conducive to learning. Conflicts are a natural part of life and therefore a natural part of school life.

Learning to constructively deal with conflict is a life-skill that the school community members need. When members learn to manage their own conflicts, the atmosphere at school is more pleasant for everyone. In such an environment, teachers and students can spend more time teaching and learning respectively. Many educators believe that student behavior affects academic achievement (Adeyemi, 2009). Therefore, negative behavior has always been a concern for educators. Thus, escalating violence in schools is a concern not only to educators, but also to the general public.

Whatever the causative agents to institutional conflict may be, educators, parents and policy makers (Collard, 2003; Abosode, 2006) have consistently counseled on the need for quick resolution of organizational conflict. It is important for school administrators to pay attention to this call because studies by Lynch (2000) and Onoyume (2007) show that when conflict is not adequately resolved, or when there is undue delay in the resolution of conflict, properties, lives and academic hours of unimaginable magnitude are lost. Delay in resolution of school conflict has resulted in disruption of school calendars leading to economic as well as psychological exertion.

Objectives of the study: The specific objective formulated to guide this study was to:

To establish intervention measures in conflict management in boarding secondary schools in Western province, Kenya

Research question: The research question of the study was stated as follows:

What intervention measures can be put in place in boarding secondary schools in western province, Kenya?

Justification of the study: Some of the serious challenges facing the management of secondary school education are related to management of conflict in secondary schools. The findings of this study may be significant in various ways: on the theoretical value, the findings may provide greater insight to the administrators

and managers of secondary schools on issues related to conflict management in secondary schools.

Besides, the findings may also enlighten the policy makers in order to address the problem of how to improve on ways of addressing the various conflicts in secondary schools. The findings of the study would also be expected to benefit Kenya Education Staff Institute (KESI) with regard to salient training needs for headteachers and teachers that need to be addressed in secondary schools of Western Province. The findings of the study would also contribute to the body of knowledge in improving on secondary school conflict management.

This study is very valuable to the management of secondary schools since it seeks to provide vital information about conflict management in schools. This in turn, would help the school management to determine suitable ways in dealing with conflict in educational sector. The study would also be important to the management of organizations and government ministries especially the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in their bid to deal with conflict in schools and improve the education standards in the country. The study would assist the Ministry of Education Science and Technology and specifically the Kenya Institute of Education in developing a curriculum that can be used to enhance the capacity of the administrators, the teachers, and the students in handling conflicts in secondary schools. This would help to reduce organizational school conflicts. The study is worthy because it proposes solutions to improve stability in the educational institutions as well as other public organizations/sectors in Kenya prone to all sorts of conflicts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive analysis research is more important in Education since human beings are much more complex and more difficult to study than subjects in many other sciences (Kathuri and Douglas, 1993). The major purpose of descriptive research is exploration and description of the state of affairs as it exists (Kothari, 2007). Descriptive studies often result in the formulation of important principles of knowledge and solution to significant problems. They involve measurement, classification, analysis, comparison and interpretation of data (Kombo and Tromp, 2006).

The study population comprised all teachers in 87 public boarding secondary schools in Western Province in Kenya. The province has 46 girls' boarding secondary schools with 828 teachers and 41 boys' boarding secondary schools with 738 teachers. The total number of teachers was 1566. The schools were categorized as follows:

The stratified random sampling technique and purposive sampling techniques were used. The stratified random sampling technique involves dividing the population into homogeneous subgroups and then taking a simple random sample in each group. The sample was selected in such a way to ensure that certain subgroups in the population were represented in the sample in proportion to the number in the population and the subgroups had equal chance to be included. This type of sampling is necessary when the population to be sampled is not homogeneous in terms of certain required characteristics. Rather than selecting randomly from the entire population, the researcher divides the population into two or more subpopulations (strata). The populations are expected to constitute the expected homogeneity (Kathuri and Douglas, 1993). This method is appropriate when the researcher is interested in issues related to gender, race or age disparities in the population.

The schools were stratified into boys' boarding secondary schools and girls' boarding secondary schools (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). This technique was used to ensure that all subgroups of boys' secondary schools and girls' secondary schools were represented in the study sample in proportion of their number in the population itself. This technique ensured that the teachers from these two categories were well represented in the sample.

Cohen and Manion (1994) state that a sample size of 30 is held by many to be the minimum number if a researcher plans to use statistical analysis on data. The sample size should accurately represent the population under survey. In this case 60 percent could represent the population well. A representative sample of 52 deputy headteachers, 52 Guidance and Counseling teachers and 416 classroom teachers in 52 boarding secondary schools of the study population were selected. The school, in this study was used as the unit of analysis, in which case a representative sample of boarding secondary schools constituted 60 % of the boarding schools in the province. This sample size is considered suitable for descriptive study such as this one. Regarding the same, Borg and Gall (1983):

In many educational research projects, small samples are more appropriate than large samples ... a study that probes deeply into the characteristics of a small sample provides more knowledge than a study that attacks the same by collecting only shallow information on a large sample.

Random sampling technique was used to select schools and respondents in each subgroup. The random sampling procedure adopted was sampling with replacement. In this method, symbols were assigned to schools and respondents and the elements were returned to the population after being drawn. The process was repeated until the correct sample was reached. A sample

of schools was selected and 10 teachers from each school were randomly sampled to participate. In total 520 respondents were selected for the study.

The data was collected using questionnaires, document analysis and interviews. The focus during the field survey was on gathering primary data. The questionnaire was the principal tool for collecting primary data. Questionnaires are used to collect basic descriptive information from a broad sample (Kathuri and Douglas, 1993). The questionnaire was preferred for its suitability to this study. It is suitable as a method of data collection because it allowed the researcher to reach a larger sample within limited time. It also ensured confidentiality and thus gathered more candid and objective replies. The questionnaires were prepared for deputy headteachers, Guidance and Counseling teachers and class teachers.

The questionnaire was structured into four sections. The first section requested for the general information of the respondent; the second captured information on factors leading to various conflicts in schools; the third section captured information on forms of punishment administered to misbehaving students in girls' and boys' secondary schools; and finally the fourth section captured data on the use of punishment as a strategy for conflict management. The set of questionnaires were entitled Teachers' Responses on Punishment as a Strategy for Conflict Management Questionnaire (TRPSCMQ). It was used to elicit information on the effective use of punishment as a conflict management strategy.

The interview guide was used to gather data from the key informants who were drawn from the deputy headteachers of secondary schools in western province. Interview is used to gather responses in depth, especially from a sample. Deputy headteachers were interviewed because they deal with discipline and chair disciplinary committees in secondary schools. Interviews are used when the study deals with sensitive topics or those that attempt to elicit deeper responses that cannot easily be measured by questionnaires. Structured interviews were used to acquire information from the informants. This involved asking each informant similar questions. Questions were framed in such a way that they allowed further probing wherever clarification was necessary. Interview proceedings were transcribed. According to Kombo and Tromp (2006) structured interviews have advantages such as the reliability of the information being high, it gives in-depth information about particular cases, it is systematic, it is time saving, it is comprehensive, besides the data collected being quantifiable.

The deputy headteacher interview schedule consisted of open ended questions that allowed probing during interviews. The schedule provided a structure that aided in obtaining the necessary information efficiently in a businesslike atmosphere. The schedule also provided accuracy checks on the responses. During the interview data were recorded by writing down the responses. Interviews were used to gather information on conflicts managed in schools and the effectiveness of punishment

as an instrument of conflict management in secondary schools in Western Province.

With the help of document analysis guide the data collected was used to cross validate the responses given by the deputy headteachers and teachers on punishment as an instrument for conflict management in secondary schools in Western province. The researcher perused the records of the teacher on duty, daily records, minor and major offense records in the staffroom and deputy headteacher's office. This was done with a view of obtaining information on punishment administered in school using documents that are relevant.

It is necessary to ascertain the validity of the instruments used to collect data for the research findings to be reliable. According to Simatwa (2007) validation and estimation of the reliability of the research instruments is necessary because low or unknown validity and reliability could have deleterious effects on the respondents. Furthermore, invalid and unreliable instruments could lead to erroneous research conclusions which in turn invalidate the research findings. Validity is therefore the degree to which a test actually measures the variables it claims to measure. It refers to the systematic error in measurement; thus measuring what a researcher thinks he/she is measuring or if there is a systematic error involved. It refers to how well the measured indicators really measure what they are supposed to measure (Kathuri and Douglas, 1993).

The validity of the instruments is measured by the degree to which it purports to measure (Kothari, 2007). In order to ascertain content and face validity, the questionnaires and in-depth interviews were presented to experts in test and measurement who matched all the items of the questionnaire with the research questions to ascertain whether the instrument actually measured all that it was supposed to measure. After scrutiny and advice the contents and impressions of the instruments were improved based on the authorities' advice and comments. The questionnaire and interview items were then constructed in a way that they relate to each question. That ensured that all research questions were covered.

To ensure reliability of the instruments the researcher conducted a pilot study in two secondary schools in Western Province before the actual study. The two schools were not included in the main study. The main purpose of the pilot study was to check on suitability and the clarity of the questions on the instruments designed, relevance of the information being sought, the language used and the content validity of the instruments from the responses given. The reliability of the instrument was determined through the test retest reliability technique (Gay, 1996). The test - retest method was used to confirm the reliability of the instruments. The instrument was administered to the same respondents twice within an interval of three weeks. The responses to these items were computed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation

Coefficient analysis. A correlation coefficient 'r' of 0.71 was obtained indicating the instrument was reliable and consistent for the study. The data analyzed were through the use of percentages.

The data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed by the use of descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). Descriptive analysis is appropriate for this study because it involves the description, analysis and interpretation of circumstances prevailing at the time of study. Basic statistical techniques were used to analyze various items of the questionnaire. These included averages, percentages, frequencies and totals. This study used frequencies and percentages because they easily communicate the research findings to majority of readers (Gay, 1992). Frequencies easily show the number of subjects in a given category.

With the aid of the coding system the researcher came up with various themes that capture relevant information on punishment as a strategy for conflict management. Data with similar topics were organized into a folder. Thereafter, the researcher employed Straus and Cobins' (1998) approach to data synthesis, in which contents of each folder were read to identify the meaning of the theme or category. Data collected was analyzed according to the nature of the response. Once the coding was completed, the responses were transferred into a summary sheet by tabulating. This was then tallied to establish frequencies, which were converted to percentage of the total number. Responses from open-ended questions were recorded. To determine the frequencies of each response, the number of respondents giving similar answers was converted to percentages to illustrate related levels of opinion.

The information collected was coded, tabulated and the frequencies and percentages were worked out in readiness for analysis, interpretation, discussion and conclusion. Data from in-depth interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The transcripts were then organized into themes and categories as they emerged from the field.

Table 1: Western province public boarding secondary schools

Category of secondary schools	No. of secondary schools	
	No. of secondary schools	No. of teachers
Public boys	41	738
Public girls	46	828
Total	87	1566

Provincial Education Office Kakamega (2008),

Table 2: Sample of boarding secondary schools and respondents

Category of secondary schools	No. of secondary schools	Subjects/respondents			
		DHT	G/C	TRS	Total
Public boys	25	25	25	200	250
Public girls	27	27	27	216	270
Total	52	52	52	416	520

Information gathered from document analysis was tallied and converted to percentages and analyzed accordingly. The information gathered from document analysis and observation was also used to crosscheck the information from the questionnaire and interview schedules.

FINDINGS

Intervention measures: The study population comprised all teachers in 87 public boarding secondary schools in Western Province in Kenya with a total number of 1566 teachers as shown in Table 1.

A sample of schools was selected with 10 randomly sampled teachers from each school. In total 520 respondents were selected for the study as shown from Table 2.

The objective sought to establish the intervention measures in conflict management in boarding secondary schools. In Western Province drug abuse was cited as a factor leading to unrest in schools. Among the measures they proposed are introducing alcohol and drug abuse studies as a compulsory subject from primary school, restricting sale of alcohol to children and raising the legal drinking age from 18 to 21. Teachers report that the inclusion of conflict resolution principles in the curriculum helps students obtain a better understanding of the relationship between academics and the real world.

Effective teaching involves effective communication that motivates. Enthusiasm and organization are two critical components of effective teaching. There is need to teach students how to think since the facts fade quickly from memory, but the rules for good thinking can be used anywhere. Mediation is a popular process to manage conflicts, but there is little systematic insight into its mechanisms. A mediator can induce two conflict parties to behave cooperatively. If the mediator recommends cooperative behavior and threatens to punish deviations, she/he achieves the efficient solution. Similar results even obtain if the mediator is biased towards one party or has no incentive to prevent the conflict. Communication between the mediator and the conflict parties increases cooperation, even if punishment is impossible. However, when cooperation fails, communication without punishment leads to particularly low payouts for the 'losing' party (Eisenkopf, 2009).

To reduce corporal punishment in school, change must also occur outside the classroom. This includes improving broader social systems; however, it also includes improving the knowledge and discussion among educational policy makers (Straus, 1999). Knowing that there are other forms of punishment that may be more effective (and that there are negative effects of corporal punishment) is often the first step in stopping its use. They need to be exposed to alternative punishments and the best information possible about the ones they use. This, in turn, might influence school board policy.

There is need to develop clear goals, objectives, and course policies. These provide the blueprint for the class to develop both process (or "how to") goals and outcomes (or "where to"). The goals and objectives should be communicated to the class in a carefully and clearly written syllabus. It is evident that a classroom management style, which incorporates democratic processes and shares power with the students, can increase compliance levels through increased satisfaction of students' needs, a reduction in students feeling controlled and increased motivation and engagement.

The draft school rules be presented for discussion in the open forum (*baraza*). Once the rules have been adopted, every student be given a copy to be signed in the presence of the parent/guardian as a binding contract. Moreso the rules should be clear and state in an unequivocal terms the reward for good behavior as well as the punishment to be meted in the event of a breach of any of the rules.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made: Guidance and Counselling was proposed as an effective method of dealing with indiscipline because it addresses the problem and its root cause. Through effective guidance and counselling, students would also realize their mistakes and initiate behaviour change aimed at being better disciplined. Therefore, guidance and counselling leads to the peaceful resolution of problems as no ill feelings that may lead to aggressive behaviour will be harboured. The findings indicate that the level of discipline in many secondary schools in Western Kenya is very low.

School administration has been adversely affected by lack of knowledge of conflict management. Most administrators handled conflicts by trial and error approach because there were no specific procedures and methods of managing conflicts. In most of the secondary school systems, students were not allowed to participate in making decisions affecting them. In many cases the students took to the streets to protest against the school authority. The staff members on the other hand were not excluded from all kinds of conflict. Staff and students in conflict resolution rarely explored the use of dialogue as a resolution technique. Finally the issue of conflict management has reached the point where effective use of relevant strategies should be explored and employed.

School administrators control students by imposing some form of punishment, viewing it as the most effective means of deterring students from repeatedly failing to behave properly. Schools use policy documents such as school code of conduct which spell out clearly school regulations or 'ground rules' that help the students know what is expected of them in order to maintain a well run and organized school. The rigid implementation of the school code of conduct is important though it creates anti-establishment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and conclusions of this study the following recommendations were made for the improvement of conflict management in secondary schools:

- The establishment of Students Representative Council (SRC) in each school and the enlightenment of the students on the importance of the SRC will enhance conflict management strategies. This should be implemented alongside initiating open assemblies (attended by teachers, administrators, and students) for airing grievances in an environment of openness, tolerance and respect. This would ensure that students are involved in the administration of their schools to decrease the incidences of conflicts. Concerning the implementation of school rules and regulations, the school administration should meet students. Dialogue with students to discuss discipline matters, rules and regulations as well as issues that affect them on regular basis should be considered as a priority. During admission process students should be made aware of the implications before signing that they will obey rules and regulations.
- There is need to reason and talk with students in age-appropriate ways. Verbal teacher-student interactions enhance children's cognitive ability, model patience, kindness, empathy, and cooperation. Parents and teachers should be aware of the powerful influence their actions have on a child's or group's behavior. Also daily opportunities should be provided for students to practice rational problem solving, and to study alternatives and the effect of each alternative. Students need to be encouraged and praised. A nonverbal response such as a smile or a nod, or a verbal response such as "good" or "right" not only provides incentives for accomplishment, but also builds student's confidence. Students should be allowed to participate in setting rules-and identifying consequences for breaking them. This empowers students to learn how to manage their own behavior. Provide consistency, structure, continuity, and predictability in student's lives. Encouraging student's autonomy-allows them to think for themselves, and to monitor their own behavior, letting their conscience guide them.

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