



INFLUENCE OF PRINCIPALS' CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES ON CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MURANG'A COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

This study examined the influence of principals' conflict management strategies on conflict resolutions in secondary schools in Murang'a County. The study adopted descriptive research design. The target population comprised of 2,613 principals and deputy principals. The sample size was 400 respondents. Data were collected using questionnaires and interview guides. Data analysis was done through the use of descriptive and inferential statistics. The study established that schools had conflict management techniques. Mediation was commonly used in resolving conflicts between principal and teachers. Conflict management techniques were found to have a positive linearly significant influence on conflict management strategies. The study concluded that secondary schools had conflict management strategies and mediation was commonly used in resolving conflicts between principal and teachers. The study recommended for more capacity building on school principals on utilization of conflicts management strategies currently in use in schools. This is due to the fact that, although schools have conflict management techniques, conflicts abound and hence the need for more training.

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1. Introduction

Conflict is part and parcel of the individual, group or organization life and the membership of any organization have to adhere to the set rules and regulations in order to overcome the tendencies to conflicts (Majoli, 2013). Conflict may result when two or more people possess divergent beliefs in the organization and are strongly striving to attain (Omoike, 2014). The causes of school conflicts are due to the existence of structural factors in the school context. Since the school set up involves the interaction of different parties ranging from the parents, learners and teachers, conflict is inevitable and is bound to interfere with the smooth operations of these institutions (Aja, 2014).

Conflicts have enormous negative consequences in the lives of individuals, groups and organizations and hence the need for mitigation. Several techniques of conflict management used by organizational leadership exist. They include; avoidance style, compromise style, accommodation style, collaboration and competition leadership styles (Ohio Commission on Dispute and Conflict Management Report as cited in Nwofia, 2015). Ossai and Nwalado (2011) opine that conflict management techniques may be categorized into two groupings: intervention and non-intervention categories. In the first category of non-intervention strategies, the school principals give room for the parties involved in the conflict to resolve the conflict naturally. Such non-intervention strategies may range from bargaining, avoidance, compromising, politics, bribing, collaborative as well as the integrative problem solving strategy. In the intervention category, the school principals may intervene in looking for a solution to the conflict since they have interest in the conflict through use of force, smoothing, obedience, deterrence among many others (Angela, 2014).

School conflicts are not a new phenomenon in the Kenyan education context. School conflicts are diverse and form part of the Kenyan education history just like any other education environment in the world. Similarly, Murang'a County is leading in cases of school arson and general school indiscipline in 2016 in central Kenya (Murang'a County Education News, 2017). The view in this paper is that examining the influence of principals' conflict management strategies on conflict resolutions in secondary schools in Kenya may create a breakthrough for permanently mitigating the many conflicts interfering with the smooth running of the schools.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

There exists no clear policy on conflict management techniques used by school principals in resolving conflicts. Despite the absence of such a policy, school principals are expected to manage emerging school conflicts amicably. Principals in public secondary schools in Murang'a County have not been spared when it comes to fully management of conflict. Although conflict affects the entire membership of the school community, principals represent the epitome of leadership in secondary schools and are, therefore, at the

forefront of encountering and resolving conflicts in the schools. It is on this basis that this paper focused on the techniques that principals employ in solving school conflicts.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This purpose of this study was to examine the influence of principals' conflict management strategies on conflict resolutions in public secondary schools in Murang'a County.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conflict Management Techniques in Schools

Majola (2013) argued that the process of managing conflict involves the encouragement by the organization management the explicit interaction of knowledge types, attitude and skills that aims at effectiveness in organization operations. Managing conflicts requires negotiations among the competing groups with divergent views in attempting to find solutions to the problems affecting organizations. Basically, conflict management techniques involve the process of ensuring that total prevention of the escalation of harmful or destructive related conflict is prevented or eliminated at all costs. For this to be undertaken effectively, competent and effective conflict resolution mechanisms must be articulated through a social process that accommodates all the parties (Aja, 2014).

The school principal has the responsibility of constituting a positive strategy of dealing with conflicts in the school environment. For success and effectiveness in this endeavour, efforts should be taken in realizing the need of being open and assertive in order to maximize the chances of resolving the conflict in an amicable manner (Steyn, 2007). Gyan and Offin (2007) identified five ideal techniques that school principals can employ in resolving the school related conflicts. They include use of force, avoidance of the conflict, compromising when conflict arises, accommodating the conflicting parties and attempting at solving the problem in the conflict.

2.1.2 Avoidance

The avoidance strategy occurs when one party in a conflict attempt to foil the oncoming conflict by agreeing to abide by the perspective of the other party notwithstanding the satisfaction desired. The avoidance strategy is an unassertive and uncooperative style since the involved parties attempt to postpone the resettlement of the conflict to the future and the end result is that the conflict is not fully resolved (Majola, 2013). Steyn and Van Niekerk (2007) stated that avoidance strategy is a management style used in resolving less important issues. This is especially so where when the chances of success in resolving the conflict and the disturbances involved are less than the benefits expected. This is also especially where other people exist who can manage the conflicts more successfully.

2.1.3 Compromising

Compromising is applicable where a party, an individual or an organization has scarcity of resources and its demands are more than the resources available. The compromising technique takes place when the parties in the conflict resolve to share the available resources equally in order to gain mutual benefits (Majola, 2013). For the parties in contest, the mutual resolution to share the available resources creates a win-win situation where there are no possible losers and the decision taken is the work of both the parties in contest (Steyn & Van Niekerk, 2007). The only weakness of this strategy is that the compromising parties have end results that are less than the original projections. The strategy is also useful in place of a situation where the use of collaboration strategy is not useful or palatable (Majola, 2013).

2.1.4 Accommodating

Accommodation or smoothing refers to the resolution of conflicts involving two or more groups of individuals where there is a tendency of one group meeting the interests of the other at own cost (Steyn, 2008). The use of accommodation is prevalent when one group is on the wrong side of the beliefs of the other and it lead to elevation of the status of one group by creating a sense of positive reasoning. Accommodation strategy is effective for enhancement of social benefits for use in the future in case of renew of the conflict. Stevahn, Keally and Munger (2005), further argued that the criteria for manifestation of constructive conflict management starts with the recognition of the realities of conflict in the sense that conflict is inevitable. Then, the willingness to resolve the conflict should follow as well as attempting to establish the compromise of the conflict.

2.1.5 Problem Solving

Problem solving in conflict management attempts at forging satisfaction on the fears of the two sides involved in the conflict. This is through attempting at creating amicable resettlement of the conflict by use of honest and straightforward discussions. Problem solving employ the use of negotiations as the main focus of seeking solutions that create satisfactions on the two sides involved in the conflict (Steyn & Van Niekerk, 2007). Problem solving technique is one of the most effective conflict management strategies among conflicting parties. One disadvantage existing in problem solving is the lengthy amount of time required in negotiations. Problem solving as stated by Snodgrass and Haines (2005) is viewed as the anchor skill in most of the applicable school-based conflict management programmes. It is suitable in application in most of the related conflict management strategies that school principals may use successfully.

Literature has been reviewed based on the findings of researchers on conflict management techniques in schools. In a study on how school principals adopt and utilize conflict management strategies in Nigeria, Ezeugbor, Onyali & Okoye (2015) undertook a study with a sample size of 259 respondents. Descriptive survey research design was applied and a number of findings were registered. Findings established that the numerous conflict management techniques applied by the school principals were not

totally effective in many schools. Additionally, there was low utilization of conflict management strategies to resolve school conflicts.

A study by Aja (2013) looked at strategies used by principals in dealing with conflicts in Nigerian secondary schools in Ebonyi State. The study used descriptive design and data collection instruments in this study were through questionnaires with hypothesis test undertaken as a study guide. The target population was 221 school heads, 3,285 teachers from 221 public secondary schools. From the findings it was observed that there was mostly the application of intervention and non-intervention strategies by the school heads in resolving the conflicts occurring in the schools in Ebonyi state.

Adeyemi and Ademilua (2012) study was on the strategies employed in resolving school conflicts and their effectiveness in Universities in Nigeria. This study used descriptive research design with a targeted population of 62 Nigerian public universities. The findings established that existing strategies for conflict management were grossly inadequate in dealing with the recurring conflicts. Gyan and Offin (2014) sought to understand the strategies used in management of conflicts in secondary schools in Ashanti Region in Ghana. The research design used was descriptive with the targeted population comprising of 43 students selected from Senior High School. From the findings of this study, the respondents stated that when the strategies of conflict management are properly formulated and implemented, there is a high likelihood of resolving a conflict.

Afful-Broni (2014) study was on the assessment of strategies used by school administrators in managing conflict in Ghana. The research design was a descriptive case study in which the researcher administered questionnaires, conducted interviews and made observations to elicit respondents' reactions on the ideal strategies of managing school related conflicts in the Winneba Senior High School. The findings indicated that as ways of managing conflict, the school heads built consensus, avoided arguing and blaming staff and students when problems arose; they met with relevant parties when they noticed the emergence of conflict, and sought the assistance of the Ghana Education Service as well as counsellors.

Majola (2013) study was based in South Africa and it sought to establish the conflict management strategies utilized by the School Governing Body (SGB). Data collection instruments were the questionnaires and interview schedules with the sample size comprising of 230 respondents. From the study findings, it was imperative that the management of conflicts by the teachers is still wanting since they usually resolve personal conflicts through quarrels when learners are present.

Sompa (2015) sought to establish strategies used by teachers and school heads in resolving the conflicts in selected secondary schools of Lusaka Zambia. The study made use of descriptive survey research design through the application of interviews, focus group discussions and document review to collect data from a sample of 107 participants in seven public secondary schools. The findings showed that teachers and principals were able to manage conflict through different management strategies such as confrontation, avoidance, dialogue, maintaining government policy by giving teachers copies of

working conditions, charging the teacher, mediation, communication and scolding the teacher. Angela (2014) carried out a research study seeking to assess the strategies applied by the heads of schools in the management of conflicts in public secondary schools located in rural Tanzania. In this study, qualitative and quantitative approaches were used. The various conflict management strategies that the school heads made use of were not suited for the resolving the types of conflicts common in the schools. Kipyego (2013) investigated the strategies of managing conflicts commonly utilized by secondary school principals in Nandi Central District. Target population comprised of 36 schools and 456 tutors. The findings indicated that negotiations and mediation were common techniques in conflict management.

3. Material and Methods

Descriptive research design was employed in the study. The study targeted 249 public secondary schools with 2,613 school principals, teachers and Sub County Directors (SCDs) forming the target population. Yamane (1967) sample size formula was used to select a sample size of 400 respondents. Primary data were collected using a questionnaire and interview schedules. A pilot test was conducted to assist in enhancing the validity and reliability of the instruments. For authorization in data collection, an introduction letter from the Graduate School at Kenyatta University and a permit from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) were obtained. For data analysis, descriptive and inferential techniques were used. Using SPSS, data were coded as per the patterns of research questions and objectives. Qualitative data obtained were analyzed by narrative reporting and categorized into themes. The findings were presented using pie charts, bar charts and frequency distribution tables.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Principals' Conflict Management Techniques

Table 1 shows the respondents information on techniques used by principals in conflict management.

Table 1: Techniques for conflict management

Strategies	Mediation	Guidance and Counseling	Arbitration	Punishment
Principal with Teacher	198 (65.1%)	54 (17.8%)	40 (13.2%)	12 (3.9%)
Teacher with Students	84 (27.6%)	174 (57.2%)	8 (2.6%)	38 (12.5%)
Teacher with Teachers	202 (66.4%)	42 (13.8%)	56 (18.4%)	4 (1.3%)
Students with Students	70 (23%)	190 (62.5%)	20 (6.6%)	24 (7.9%)

The results show that majority of respondents (65.1%) showed that mediation was commonly used in resolving conflicts between principal and teachers. Similarly, when the conflict was between teachers and students, mediation was used as stated by 84% of the respondents. Further, when the conflict was between teachers and teachers, mediation was again used as stated by 66.4% of the respondents. This implies that school principals should have the requisite knowledge and experience of understanding the nature of the school conflict and the applicable resolution mechanisms. The findings support Yambo and Tuitoek (2014) who stated that mediation is a tested strategy of dealing with conflict among school parties.

4.2 Effectiveness of Conflict Management Techniques employed by Principals

Figure 1 presents analysis of effectiveness of school management techniques used by principals in conflict resolution.

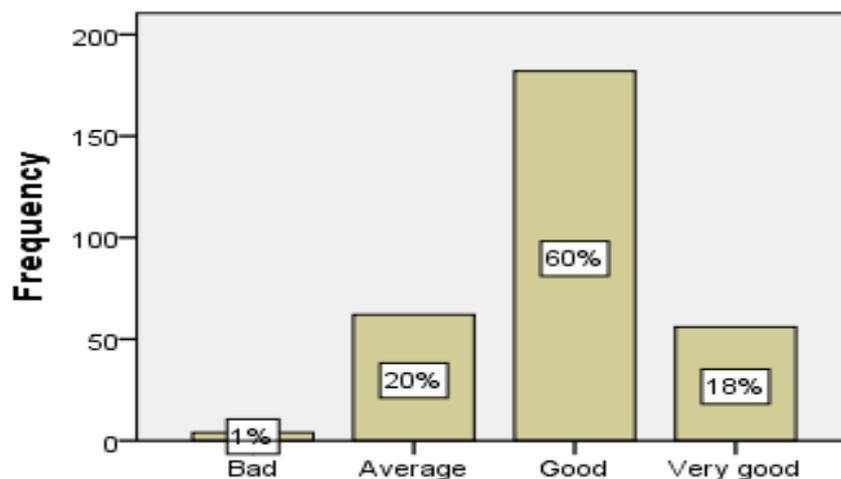


Figure 1: Effectiveness of conflict management techniques

From the results, it is evident that 60% of the respondents stated that the strategies were effective while 20% indicated that the strategies were average. Finally, 18% suggested that the strategies were very good and 1% stated they were bad. The findings complement Ramani and Zhimin (2010) who argued that there is need for school administrators to possess knowledge and experience for conflict management. This implies that school principals should be well versed with conflict management strategies in order equip the school with key attributes that will bring in the understanding the nature of the conflict and effectiveness to resolve them amicably.

4.2.1 Conflict Handling Techniques

Figure 2 indicates the conflict handling techniques used by the teachers while supporting the school head.

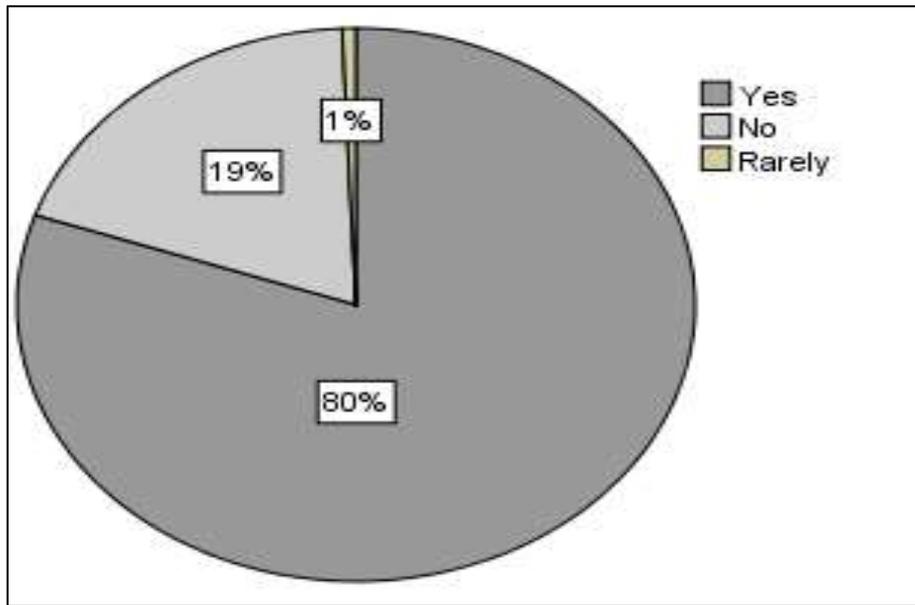


Figure 2: Conflict handling techniques

Results show that majority of the respondents (80%) agreed that they had the ability in handling conflicts. The findings agree with Namara (2007) who, likewise, stated that it is the prerogative of school administrators to empowering the teachers to offer support in conflict management. Thus, school principals should empower the teachers through sponsoring them for workshops and training on conflict resolution strategies in order to jointly deal with school conflicts.

4.2.2 Conflict Management Techniques Used by Principals

Table 2 indicates responses on techniques of involvement of teachers by principals in school conflict management.

Table 2: Conflicts management techniques

Conflicts	SA %	A %	UN %	D %	SD %
Acts as a mediator	21.1	69.1	5.9	2.6	1.3
Use conflict management techniques in finding a solution	20.4	64.5	9.2	3.9	2.0
Strives for good interpersonal relationships with teachers	31.6	55.3	7.2	3.3	2.6
Is proactive in managing conflict	19.7	59.2	6.6	13.2	1.3

The results show that majority of the respondents (69.1%) agreed with 21.1% strongly agreeing that the school head acted as a mediator in conflict situations. Further, the study shows that majority of the respondents (64.5%) agreed with and 20.4% strongly agreeing that the school head used conflict management techniques in finding a solution. The study shows that majority of the respondents (55.3%) agreed, with 31.6% strongly agreeing that the school head strived for good interpersonal relationships. Finally, the study shows that (59.2%) agreed and 19.7% strongly agreed that the school head was proactive in managing conflict in the school. The findings complement Ramani and

Zhimin (2010) that the ability of the school principal to overcome school conflict is squarely on the ability to incorporate teachers in conflict resolution strategies. The implication for the school principals is that possession of knowledge and experience to equip the teachers with key attributes that will bring in the understanding of the nature of the conflict and effectiveness to resolve them amicably is crucial.

4.2.3 Suggestions for Improving Conflicts Resolution Techniques

Figure 3 indicate the suggestions for improving conflict resolution techniques in schools.

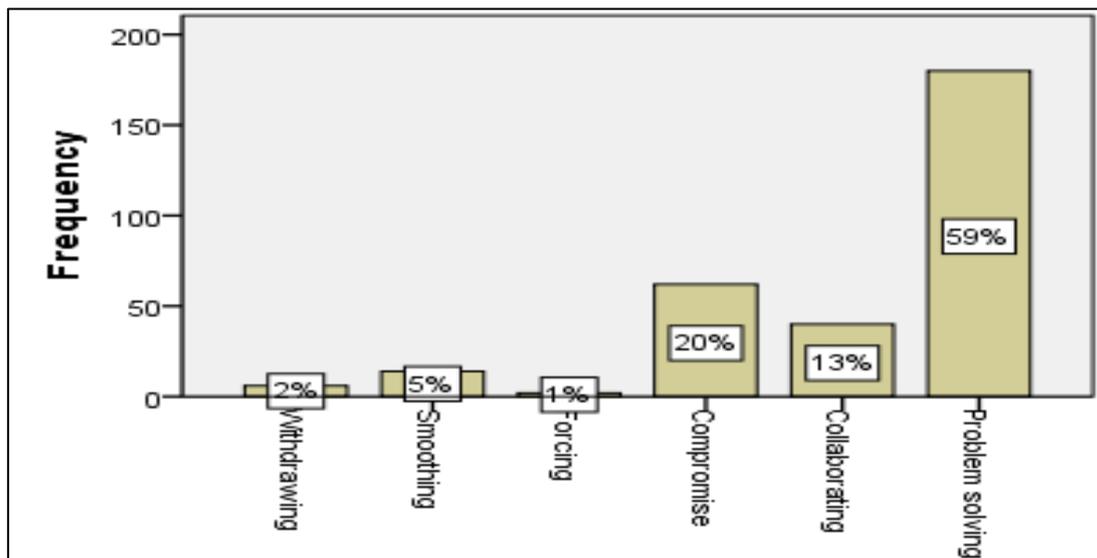


Figure 3: Suggestions for improving conflict resolution techniques

Majority of the respondents, 59% prefer problem solving as a viable suggestion for improving conflicts. Another 20% of the respondents opted for compromise while 13% suggested collaboration for improving conflicts. The findings support Namara (2007) who stated that school administrators ought to solve conflicts in the school to ensure high level of harmony and performance.

4.3 Inferential Analysis for Study Variables

Inferential statistics included test for reliability analysis, normality, correlation analysis and regression analysis.

4.3.1 Reliability Analysis

To measure the internal consistency for each variable, analysis of reliability was conducted as shown in Table 3. The Cronbach's Alpha values for techniques to resolve conflicts and school heads management of conflict techniques was 0.852 indicating good reliability.

Table 3: Reliability analysis

Reliability	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
School heads management conflict strategies	8	0.852

4.3.2 Normality Test

Table 4 shows the results of Normality test for conflict management techniques. All of the values of skewness and kurtosis indices did not exceed the absolute values of 2 and, therefore, the data set was considered to follow normal distribution and consequently the relationship would be tested using multiple linear regressions.

Table 4: Normality test

	N	Skewness	Std. Error	Kurtosis	Std. Error
	Statistic	Statistic		Statistic	
Conflict Management Techniques	304	.05	.14	.627	.279

4.3.3 Correlation Analysis

As shown in Table 5, correlation analysis was undertaken to measure the strength of the linear association between the independent and dependent variables. Results indicated that conflict management techniques were positive and significantly related to conflict resolution strategies ($r = 0.616$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000 < 0.05$).

Table 5: Correlation analysis

		Conflict management techniques	Conflict resolution
		Pearson	.616**
Conflict management techniques	Sig.	.000	.128
	N	304	304

4.3.4 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was necessary in order to verify the level of relationship of the variables as indicated in Table 6. The R square value was 0.402 which clearly suggests that there is a strong relationship between conflict management techniques and conflict resolution. This indicates that conflict management technique shares a variation of 40.2% of conflict resolutions.

Table 6: Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.641 ^a	0.41	0.402	0.36936

4.3.5 Regression ANOVA

As indicated in Table 7, regression ANOVA test was conducted to test the goodness of fit of the data for the overall regression model. It also tested the level of variation of conflict

management techniques. The overall model was a good fit since (F-value=52.021 and p-value=0.000<0.05).

Table 7: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	28.388	4	7.097	52.021	.000 ^b
1 Residual	40.792	299	.136		
Total	69.180	303			

4.3.6 Regression Coefficient

As shown in Table 8, conflict management techniques had a positive linearly significant influence on conflict resolution. ($\beta=0.429$, T-value=12.940, $p=0.000<0.05$). Thus, a unit change in conflict management techniques resulted in 0.429 unit increase in conflict resolution. This means that possessing the right conflict management techniques is important in fortifying the school principals' ability to resolve conflicts.

Table 8: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.175	.133		8.826	.000
1 Conflict Management Techniques	.429	.033	.585	12.940	.000

5. Conclusion

The paper concluded that secondary schools had formulated conflict management techniques and mediation was commonly used in resolving conflicts between head teacher and teachers. It is imperative that the school principals should continuously strengthen the conflict management strategies used in schools and even harness the skills of mediation in order to effectively resolve school related conflicts.

6. Recommendation

The paper recommended for more capacity building on school principals on utilization of conflicts management strategies currently in use in schools. This is due to the fact that, although schools have conflict management strategies, conflicts abound and hence the need for more training.

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