



Influence of Prefects' Involvement in Communication on Conflict Resolution in Public Secondary Schools: A Case Study of Kisumu County, Kenya.

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 27 March 2018;

Received in revised form:

1 May 2018;

Accepted: 12 May 2018;

Keywords

Influence,
Prefects,
Involvement,
Conflict Resolution,
Communication,
Secondary Schools.

ABSTRACT

Many schools have registered violent conflicts that have led to property destruction and disruption of learning activities in the affected schools. This is attributed to poor communication mechanisms between the students and the school administration. In the light of this, this study purposed to assess the influence of prefects' involvement in communication on conflict resolution in public secondary schools. The study used descriptive survey design with a total of 33 public secondary schools that had 33 school principals, 33 Guidance and counseling teachers, a total of 292 prefects (head boys, head girls and class secretaries) and 1772 Form Three students. This gave a target population of 2130. A stratified sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 10 schools. Piloting was done in two public secondary schools. Split half method was used to ascertain the reliability and the results correlated using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. A correlation coefficient of 0.87 was obtained and this was used to ascertain the reliability of the instruments. The researcher applied content validity to measure the relevance of the research instrument. Data collected were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). They were then analyzed using descriptive statistics and the results presented using frequency distribution tables and percentages. The study found out that involving prefects in communication enhances conflict resolution. This was supported by 60% of the principals who strongly agreed while the other 40% agreed to it. Similarly, 50% of the guidance and counseling teachers, 51.79% of the prefects and 35.14% of the students agreed. Based on these findings, it was concluded that involving prefects in communication enhances conflict resolution in public secondary schools. Therefore, it was recommended that prefects be actively and effectively involved in communication in the management and administration of public secondary schools.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Fisher (1990), conflict resolution began in the 1950s and 1960s during the peak of the Cold War that threatened the human race. This state of affairs necessitated a study into how such threatening conflicts could be handled. Crawford, et al. (1996) note that as a result, a group of professionals from different disciplines came together and explored the application of the techniques that were borrowed from industrial relations as well as domestic mediation settings of conflict control. People began developing interests in conflict resolution such that by the year 1980s it found its route to Africa. Ramani et. al, (2010) posit that various types of conflict that exist in organizations include data conflicts, structural conflicts, relationship conflicts, and interest conflicts. Conflicts can lead to disputes, grievances, lawsuits, complaints, strikes, and disciplinary actions. This has extended into schools as well where it has raised a number of views. Kinyanjui (1976) observes that some administrators perceive causes of conflicts in their school as due to lack of commitment to work in their schools. He further argues that

there are things that principals do in their schools that pose a serious challenge to the school management. Some of these include absenteeism, perennial lateness, dishonesty, inaccessibility and being autocrat or dictatorship. Some of the school principals have been forced to deal with conflicts in their schools which are due to their own making while others fail to perform well in educational administration because of frequent absenteeism in their schools (Katumanga 2000).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflicts in Kenya's public secondary schools have been on the rise in the recent past and as such the government is concerned with the disturbances in learning institutions where in some cases students have burnt down schools and even attacked teachers (Wanjiru 1999). For instance, in Wundanyi, Wandango Secondary School went on violent strike in the year 2013 and caused a lot of damage to property in addition to inflicting injuries in their teachers. In Maseno Secondary school in the same year things were no different. These conflict scenarios mainly arise due to unresolved deep rooted

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conflicts between the students and the school administrators (Crawford et. al, 1996). This prompted a consultative meeting to address rising unrests in several institutions by students in Nairobi and districts in its environs, destroying property worth over twenty million Kenya shillings. The majority of the incidents happen in secondary boarding schools, with few exceptional cases reported in day secondary schools. Some of the emergencies that arise as a result of unresolved conflicts include: arson attacks, riots and violence which result into injuries and loss of both life and property (Ramani,2010).

According to Ozigi (1971), prefect system serves as one of the communication channels between the students and the school administration. He points out that the prefect system is one of the most effective ways of involving students directly in the administration. Thus, the procedures of communication are a two-way flow of information from top to bottom and bottom-up involving prefects. This goes in line with Max Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy. In the top-down instruction, authority rests in the highest office (of the school Principal) which ensures that information flows from the principal's office down through the various levels of hierarchy (teachers and prefects) to the students. Thus, the principals set the pace and standards for school management, while the prefects implement the programmes (Mwiria, 2009). In the bottom-up communication or feedback mechanism, there is a relay of feedback on all aspects of administration through the various levels up the hierarchy (prefects and teachers) from students. This ensures a complete link between the staff and students as well as enabling the principal to obtain information for evaluation of managerial objectives (Griffin, 1994).

Carlos (1993) observes that the school rules and regulations bind the various ranks of the hierarchy of authority and ensure order. These rules and regulations are formal and must be adhered to. The prefects are used to enforce them among students. This is coordinated and maintained by the school administration. The school administration would thus emphasize the adherence to the discipline code that defines formal school rules and regulations and the laid-down procedures of communication. Within the formal set-up of school rules and regulations, a school is supposed to have a Prefects Handbook, which is a set of rules to guide the conduct of prefects while carrying out their roles to ensure harmony and smooth communication between the school administration and students (Mukiri, 2014).

However, if such rules and regulations were absent or not adhered to, the prefects would find carrying out their roles difficult (Griffin, 1994). Furthermore, if there was a breakdown in communication between the various organs of the school, then the functioning of the prefects' body would also be jeopardized. For instance, this may lead to disciplinary problems in schools. More often than not, communication from prefects to other students is intended to inform and persuade them in order to produce results. Inability to disseminate information correctly would cause misinformation, confusion and frustration, which would lead to poor implementation of instructions. Prefects need to be effective listeners (Okumbe, 2001). This is because they receive information from teachers and students. Effective listening involves concentration and understanding in order to get a mental grasp of the facts clearly. Carlos (1993) gives the following suggestions for effective communication: the message must be clear; it must be straight forward and logical. It must be complete and must provide all needed

information. It must be concise, brief and correct and must avoid exaggerations, generalizations or conclusions.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Social Systems Theory that explains and predicts organizational behaviour. Generally, based on the biological point of view, an organism is considered as an integrated system of interdependent structures and functions. The organism is constituted of cells and a cell consists of molecules, which must work in harmony for the survival of the organism. Within the organism, each molecule must know what the others are doing and be in a position of receiving and interpreting correctly information from other organisms. Ludwig Von Bertalanify argues that all organizations are systems comprised of different interrelated and interdependent units that perform their activities with an aim of achieving of common goals. In an organization these different units are referred to as sub-systems. Subsystems are the interdependent interacting elements of a system. They need to work in a coordinated way so that the entire system functions properly to achieve its goals. A system gets its inputs from the larger societal environment (supra system). From the supra system, the school gets students, teachers, resource materials, finances and so on. The system transforms the inputs into finished products.

Okumbe (1998) points out that the social systems theory was developed from the social theory to explain social changes and human interaction in organizations. Since organizations are a collection of individuals or people who come together to perform specified tasks geared towards the attainment of common goals, they are referred to as social systems. Thus, schools are social systems that bring together principals, teaching and non-teaching staff as well as prefects who carry out various tasks towards achievement of common goals. Subsystems have distinct properties both in specialization and scope of responsibilities but there is no single subsystem that is superior or inferior to others. All subsystems perform unique but complementary roles to attain the common goals of the entire system. Thus, even if the principal occupies a higher position than prefects who are in the lowest rank of the administrative hierarchy, the role of prefects in the management of school is not inferior to that of the principal. They all perform various but interrelated tasks in an interdependent manner to achieve high levels of school management and the consequent educational goals. It is, therefore, important that school administrators appreciate and recognize the role played by prefects regardless of their position in the management of their schools (Crawford et. al, 1996).

Therefore, Social Systems Theory suits well to form the theoretical basis of this study. This is because schools are social system with various sub-systems (e.g. prefect subsystem) which require significant involvement in the school management for resolution of conflicts to be a success. Their roles in communication of the school policies, decision making in key management areas, arbitration of arising disputes as well as their involvement in discipline must be clearly spelt out for the school to achieve the set common goals.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study purposed to employ the use of descriptive survey design. The design was deemed most suitable in the assessment of the influence of prefects' involvement in

management on conflict resolution in public secondary schools in Muhoroni Sub-County, Kenya due to its ability to describe characteristics of phenomena, opinions, attitudes, preferences and perception of persons involved in the study as respondents (Orodho, 2004). It aimed at achieving this in a highly representative manner (Orodho, 2009). Due to the flexibility of this design, the researcher was able to collect not only qualitative data but also quantitative data through the administration of questionnaires and conducting interviews respectively. The school principals were interviewed as opposed to the rest of the respondents who were issued with questionnaires (Petelin & Durham, 2004).

3.2 Target Population

Population refers to the entire group of individuals, events, or objects that are characterized by common observable features (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). This study targeted all the public secondary schools in Muhoroni Sub-County. According to Muhoroni Sub-County Director of Education Office, there were 33 public secondary schools. Among them were 3 girls' boarding schools, 2 girls' day schools, 2 boys' school, 23 mixed day schools and 3 mixed day and boarding public secondary schools. Out of these there was one county school and 32 sub-County schools.

This study targeted principals who were directly involved in conflict resolution in their schools, guidance and counseling teachers who address, counsel and advise students on matters touching on their welfare in the school. The study also targeted prefects especially the school head boys and/or head girls as well as class secretaries who were involved in handling students' matters at the school level and classroom level respectively. Form Four (candidates) were perceived to have a tight study schedules while Forms One and Two were considered to be new in the school hence could not provide the required information. As a result, Form Three students were also targeted by this study due to their maturity and the fact that they were directly affected by the conflict resolution policies arrived at by the administration. Going by the Muhoroni Sub-County Teachers Service Commission Office, there were 33 Principals and 33 Guidance and Counseling teachers. The total number of prefects (class secretaries (232), head boys (28) and head girls (32) in these public secondary schools was 292 with 1772 Form Three student. Therefore, the target population for this study was made up of 33 Principals, 33 guidance and counseling teachers, 292 prefects and 1772 Form Three students. This gave target population of 2130.

3.3 Sample size and Sampling Procedure

3.3.1 Sample Size

Gray (1992) asserts that a sample size of 10% of the target population is considered minimum, while a sample of 20% is required for smaller population and 30% for statistical analysis. Based on this assertion, the researcher sampled 30% of the total number of schools in the sub-county. This gave a sample size of 10 public secondary schools. The sampled schools were drawn from each of the given strata as follows:

Table 3.1 Sample Size (Schools).

Respondents' strata	Target population	Sample size
Stratum A: Girls'Boarding	3	2
Stratum B: Girls' Day	2	1
Stratum C: Boys'Boarding	2	1
Stratum D: Mixed Day	23	4
Stratum E: Mixed Day Boarding	3	2
Total	33	10

The researcher sampled 10 principals and 10 guidance and counseling teachers. Out of the 292 prefects, the researcher included 56 prefects (7 head boys, 9 head girls and 40 class secretaries) and 350 Form Three students out of the target population of 1772. This gave a sample size of 426, constituting 20% of the target population. This is in tandem with Gray (1992) who says that a sample size of 10% of the target population is considered minimum, while a sample of 20% is required for smaller population and 30% for statistical analysis.

Table 3.2 Sample Size (Respondents).

Respondents' strata	Target population	Sample size
Principals	33	10
Guidance & counseling Teachers	33	10
Prefects (H/boys, H/girls and class prefects)	292	56
Students (Form 3)	1772	350
Total	2130	426

3.3.2 Sampling Procedure

A sample is a small proportion of a population that is selected for observation, analysis and interpretation to represent the larger group from which they were selected (Best and Kahn, 1998). For the purpose of this study the researcher used stratified sampling method. The researcher drew one (1) Principal and one (1) guidance and counseling teacher from each of the ten (10) sampled schools. This gave ten (10) principals and ten (10) guidance and counseling teachers forming part of the sample. Each of the sampled girls' boarding schools, girls' day schools, mixed day and mixed day and boarding public secondary school produced one (1) head girl hence giving a total of nine (9) head girls. Each of the sampled boys' boarding schools, mixed day and mixed day and boarding public secondary school produced one (1) head boy hence giving a total of seven (7) head boys. Each of the ten (10) sampled schools provided four (4) class secretaries thus totaling to forty (40) class secretaries. This gave a total of 56 prefects. Each of the ten (10) sampled schools also provided 35 Form Three students. This gave a total of 350 Form Three students.

3.4 Research Instruments

The main research instruments used were questionnaires and interview schedules. School principals were interviewed while the rest of the respondents were issued with questionnaires. Secondary data were also obtained from official documents in the Muhoroni Sub-County Director of Education Office. Questionnaires offered the advantage of being easy and cost effective to administer to a large population (Orodho, 2009).

3.4.1 Piloting the Instruments

Once the questionnaires and interview guides were ready, they were piloted in two Public Secondary School in the Sub-county. During the actual study, the two schools were not included.

3.4.2 Validity of Instruments

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2008), validity is the accuracy of inferences that are drawn from the research results. Muli (2011) adds that it is the degree to which the results obtained from the analysis of the data actually represent the phenomena under study. This was done through content validity which was mainly concerned with whether or not the measuring instruments were representative of the full content of the problem under study. Experts in the area of study as well as the supervisors also had their opinions sought and based on their recommendations, corrections were

effected accordingly. Using face validity check, questions were ascertained whether, at face value, they appeared to be measuring the construct as per the objectives of the research. It also relied on knowledge of the way people responded to survey questions and adjustments were done accordingly. All these validity tests were conducted with the aim of enhancing accuracy and meaningfulness of the research instruments (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2008).

3.4.3 Reliability of Instruments

Reliability of a data collection instruments, according to Orodho (2009), is the ability of such instruments to produce the same results without deviation when repeated measurements are conducted using the same individuals under the same conditions. In order to ensure internal reliability of the measuring instruments in this study, the researcher used split half method. This involved administering a test to a group of individuals then splitting the test into halves using the odd-even split method. Here, the odd-numbered items formed one half of the test and the even-numbered items formed the other half of the test. The researcher then correlated the scores on one half of the test with scores on the other half of the test using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. A correlation coefficient (r) of +0.87 was realized and this ascertained the reliability of the instruments.

3.5 Methods of Data Collection

Once permission was granted, the researcher booked appointments with the respondents through the Muhoroni Sub-County Director of Education Office and the Principals of the selected schools. The researcher used interview guide for the principals and questionnaires for the rest of the respondents. The researcher visited each of the sampled schools to conduct interviews and administer the questionnaires personally. With permission from the school principal, the researcher administered one questionnaire to each head boy and/or head girl (depending on the type of school) and four other class secretaries from Form One to Form Four. The respondents were then expected to fill the questionnaires before the researcher collected them back. The researcher then administered one for Guidance and Counseling teacher before proceeding for an interview with the school principal. Confidentiality of the respondents was highly observed. This was achieved by giving relevant instructions verbally to the respective respondents.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Upon completion of the data collection exercise, the raw data was carefully examined for any errors and/or omissions that were corrected appropriately. Thereafter, the responses in the completed questionnaires and interview guides were coded onto coding sheets and then got edited, tabulated, analysed and computed into descriptive statistics (percentages and frequency distribution tables) with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results of data analysis were presented in the form of frequency tables and percentages.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The researcher acknowledged the sensitivity of some information sought for. Therefore, he was obliged to treat all the information provided with utmost propriety. Normally, respondents were reluctant to shed light particularly on issues they felt were sensitive in their schools. It was therefore the responsibility of the researcher to assure them of the confidentiality of the information. The researcher also assured

the respondents that the information provided would only be used for academic (research) purposes.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION.

The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of prefects' involvement in communication on conflict resolution in public secondary schools in Kisumu County, Kenya. It also sought to provide way forward in achieving effective conflict resolution in public secondary schools. The data collected was coded and entered in SPSS package where analysis was done and the results presented in the form of frequency tables and percentages. The sample comprised of 10 principals, 10 guidance and counseling teachers, 56 prefects (7 head boys, 9 head girls and 40 class secretaries) and 350 Form Three students. This gave a sample size of 426 respondents.

The principals, guidance and counseling teachers, prefects and students were asked to respond to the statement: 'Involvement of prefects in communication enhances conflict resolution in public secondary schools. The responses were as shown in the table 4.1

Table 4.1 shows that a majority of 60% of the interviewed principals strongly agreed that involving prefects in communication in schools enhances conflict resolution and another 40% agreed to it. 0% was neutral, 0% disagreed and 0% also strongly disagreed. Generally, all the interviewed school principals were in agreement that by involving prefects in communication in schools, conflict resolution would be enhanced. Majority of the studied guidance and counseling teachers 50% agreed that involving prefects in communication in schools enhances conflict resolution. This was followed by 40% who strongly agreed while 10% were neutral. 0% of them neither disagreed nor strongly disagreed. For the prefects, a majority of 51.79% agreed that involving prefects in communication in schools enhances conflict resolution. This was followed by 33.93% who strongly agreed to this statement. However, 5.36% of the prefects were neutral, 5.36% strongly disagreed while 3.57% disagreed. This was attributed to the fact that prefects form the link between the students and the administration, teachers included. Similarly, a majority of 35.14% of the students agreed that involving prefects in communication in schools enhances conflict resolution. This was followed by 24.29% who strongly agreed while 15.43% were neutral. However, 16.57% disagreed while the other 8.57% strongly disagreed. As indicated by the results from the four different categories of respondents, involving prefects in communication enhances conflict resolution. This was shown by the majority in each category of respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed to this. Timely and effective communication reduces confusion and frustrations hence harmonious co-existence in the school setup. This is in tandem with Mukiri (2014) who asserts that within a formal set-up of school rules and regulations, a school is supposed to have a Prefects Handbook, which is a set of rules to guide the conduct of prefects while carrying out their roles to ensure harmony and smooth communication between the school administration and students.

5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of the main finding

The objective of this study was to examine the influence of prefects' involvement in communication on conflict

Table 4.1 Influence of prefects' involvement in communication on conflict resolution.

Study group	Level of agreement	frequency	percentage
Principals	Strongly Agree	6	60%
	Agree	4	40%
	Neutral	0	0%
	Disagree	0	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0%
G & C Teachers	Strongly Agree	4	40%
	Agree	5	50%
	Neutral	1	10%
	Disagree	0	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Prefects	Strongly Agree	19	33.93%
	Agree	29	51.79%
	Neutral	3	5.36%
	Disagree	2	3.57%
	Strongly Disagree	3	5.36%
Students	Strongly Agree	85	24.29%
	Agree	123	35.14%
	Neutral	54	15.43%
	Disagree	58	16.57%
	Strongly Disagree	30	8.57%

resolution in public secondary schools in Kisumu County, Kenya. The study found out that involving prefects in communication enhances conflict resolution.

This was supported by the (interviewed) principals who strongly agreed and a majority of guidance and counseling teachers, prefects and students who altogether agreed.

5.2 Conclusions

Based on the finding of this research, it was concluded that involving prefects in communication enhances conflict resolution in public secondary schools in Kisumu County. This was supported by 60% of the principals who strongly agreed while the other 40% agreed to it. Similarly, 50% of the guidance and counseling teachers, 51.79% of the prefects and 35.14% of the students agreed.

5.3 Recommendations of the Study

It is evident that prefects play a major role in management to enhance conflict resolution in secondary schools. In order to achieve this, the researcher recommended that prefects be actively involved in communication of information from the administration to the students and vice versa. Therefore, each school should issue prefects with information/communication handbooks that define clearly the Communication protocol as well as general policies on communication in a school set up.

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