INFLUENCE OF STRATEGIES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION, ON LEARNERS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NAROK COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: The researcher sought to find out the degree to which strategies of conflict resolution used by the school administration, influence learners' academic performance in KCSE in Narok County, Kenya. The purpose of the study was to explore the influence of strategies of conflict resolution used by school administration on learners' academic performance in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education in public secondary schools in Narok County, Kenya. This study will be significant to principals in Narok County and the county at large as it will make them to know the appropriate conflict management styles which they need in managing conflicts in their schools. The study objectives include: finding out the influence of avoiding, accommodating, competing, collaborating, and compromising conflict resolution strategies on the academic performance of learners in KCSE in Narok County, Kenya. The study will be anchored on two theories: the group conflict theory and the General Systems theory. The research methodology used by the researcher was a mixed method. The research design used was descriptive survey since this method is reliable and accurate. Data were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis. The target population was 96 principals and 1056 teachers. A sample of 80 public secondary schools' principals and 192 teachers were involved. Data was collected using a questionnaire and interview. The teachers and school principals were requested to present the required information by filling the questionnaires after brief interviews. Pie charts, frequency distribution tables and percentages were used to represent quantitative data. A pilot study was conducted in 4 public secondary schools in Narok County, Kenya. The researcher used questionnaires and interviews to gather information from the respondents. Test and re-test method and Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient were used by the researcher to find out the consistency of the questionnaires. The validity of the questionnaire was verified using a team of professionals that studied the questionnaire. They then rated it and gave their approvals. The researcher observed the ethics of research on secrecy, informed authority, and storage of data. This study found out that principals in Narok county use all the five conflict management styles. A high percentage of teachers and principals agreed that there is the use of a competing style as a method of conflict management in their schools. Most of those schools whose principals relied a lot on competing, compromising, and accommodating strategies in managing their school conflicts had a mean score of between 1 and 3.5. The majority of Schools whose principals used avoiding had a mean score of between 1 and 3.5. The researcher concluded that the findings were dependable. The researcher recommended that Principals in Narok County should not use avoiding strategy to resolve conflicts since those who did not avoid conflicts scored highly. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following that Principals in Narok County should not use avoiding strategy to resolve conflicts but instead apply collaboration and accommodating as a method of settling conflicts in their schools so as to improve academic performance. Competing strategy and compromising strategies as ways of settling disputes can lead to poor results and so principals in Narok County should not depend so much on this conflict management style.

Keywords: influence, conflict resolution strategies, performance, accommodating Avoiding, collaborating, competing, compromising

1.0 Introduction

Education is used in the modern-day world to succeed. A great hindrance to education is Students-Administration conflict. Whenever this type of conflict arises, the school administration may use avoiding, accommodating, competing, compromising or collaborating conflict resolution strategies. Nayereh (2014) advised that familiarity about suitable conflict management strategies are of remarkable importance. The strategies can be used in

resolving conflicts in schools. If conflicts are not supervised and controlled, what the school intends to do shall only be in paper work and shall not be achieved. The school surrounding shall also be unfavorable to learners. According to Bisk (2016), "the five styles of conflict resolution include: Avoiding the Conflict style, Giving-in style, standing your Ground style, Compromising style and Collaborating style". Ghaffar (2010) asserted that conflict resolution strategies are important. They can be used to address conflicts in schools.

In Thailand, Salleh*et al*, (2012) in their study had to say, according to their study outcomes, that, all schools involved in their research study had become victims of conflict. Van Dou (2004) observed that various articles about conflict management in economies such as U.K and U.S.A have ardent interest that conflict causes great harm for some schools. People will not see things the same way – but they will need to live together. Brück, *et al.* (2014) in their study on school conflicts in Israel found out that, the extent to which conflict influence learners' academic performance depends on the academic capacity of the learners as well as the kind of conflict that arise. In Uganda, Smith *et al* (2015) found out that the country's policy of peace building in syllabuses and learning institutions, deals with avoiding conflict and not trying to cope with conflicts that occurred before. Novelli*et al.* (2015) argued that in order to promote peace, there should be a good will to seek for the root causes of conflicts such as politics, disparity in socio-economic factors and injustices. The counties in Kenya that experienced a lot of unrest in schools in the year 2016 include Muranga, Kisii, Kericho, Narok, Nakuru and Bomet among others. Iravo (2011) in his research findings explained that conflicts can be handled using a variety of ways extending from negotiations between the conflicting parties to mediation. Brown (2002), conflict specialists, advised those involved in conflict to use contingency approach to ensure that the conflict does not affect them negatively. Okotoni, (2002), observed that, managers resolve conflicts by unconventional ways because there are no particular approaches of handling conflicts.

Republic of Kenya (2001) indicates that conflicts in Kenyan high schools had turned out to be a great crisis that all stake holders in education should give attention. It distracts the public, the school managers and the government. If conflicts persist, they will destroy learning institution and learning process. Misoi (2009) found out that in one out of ten principals in Uasin-Gishu transferred and one out of fifty resigned from being school administrators all together due to the conflicts. The BOM or the teachers had either rejected the principals that were posted to the schools or had students' unrest in the schools. As a way of averting and resolving conflicts that might arise later, the Teachers Service Commission transferred other principals and teachers to end conflicts in their schools. The few that left administration found their task too hot. These conflicts may influence teachers' morale and students' academic outcomes.

A report of the District Education officer Nandi Central District (2010) shows that 42% of schools in the region had reported incidences of conflicts. This is alarmingly very high proportion as compared to other districts like Nandi North, Nandi South and Nandi East with 20%, 15% and 13% incidences of conflicts during similar period respectively (District Education officer's reports 2010). In Narok County more than half of the schools have had student's unrest because of conflicts between the students and school administration that were not resolved. In the year 2016 alone, examples of the schools affected by unrest include: Sister Mary Stephens Nkoitoi Secondary School, Ololulunga Boys secondary, Oloomirani boys secondary, Maasai Mara secondary school, Narok Boys secondary, Nkarreta secondary school, St. Marys' secondary school among many other schools (Oduor,2016).

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Methodology

Mixed method was used in this research study. This method had strength of being flexible. It was useful when unexpected results arose from a prior study. It was also very interactive. It also helped the researcher compare quantitative and qualitative data. Kothari (2004) stated the meaning of research methodology as systematic way of addressing the problems that are involved in research. Creswell (2003) shed some light on mixed method of doing research as a research strategy with theoretical suppositions as well as means of investigation.

2.2 Research Design

In this research study, the researcher adopted descriptive research design which included case-study and survey. It was ideal due to the reliability and accuracy of the method. This design was advantageous to the researcher in that

he was able to collect data from a broad area in a very short period of time using questionnaire.

3.0 Findings and discussions

The information below gives an outline of the researcher's findings of the research study.

3.1 Influence of Accommodating conflict management style on Academic performance in secondary schools in Narok County

The first objective of this research study was to determine the influence of accommodating strategy of resolving conflicts on learners' academic performance in KCSE in Narok County, Kenya. with regard to this objectives the findings were that on average, 82.2% of the teachers in Narok County were of the view that their principals often employ accommodating strategy in conflict management while 64.1% of the principals stated that they used accommodating strategy to resolve conflicts.

This style has a harmful side even though the learners may believe that the school administration is being friendly and therefore do not follow school rules and regulations. The average performance of most schools whose principals utilize accommodation strategy range between 1.00 -3.50. This clearly shows the negative side of using accommodation strategy. When conflict is not addressed well , it can lead to mistrust between school administration and students. The above findings are consistent with the stance by Speck and Knipe (2010), who found out that influence of accommodating strategy by principals provide chances to engage in a two-way leadership course with well thought-out prospect to partake in visualization; this leaves the prospect to fabricate possession and the dedication in the school development path. But when handled properly, conflict leads to growth, precisely becoming a pillar between school management and learners.Within shared leadership and accommodation of each other, team leaders require constant preparation in conflict management strategies such as leading consensus, facilitating dialogue, collaborative problem-solving conducting effective meetings and resolving conflicts. By developing teacher leaders the principals in actual fact distributes leadership, familiar obligation and familiar liability, which are crucial to supporting a professional learning society plan and improved performance. The use of this strategy can result to poor performance in examinations as show above.

3.2 Influence of Avoiding as a conflict strategy on Academic performance in secondary schools in Narok County

The second objective of the study was to establish influence of avoiding strategy of resolving conflicts on learners' academic performance, in KCSE in Narok County, Kenya. the findings indicate that few principals (only 6 out of 64) in the selected schools use avoiding strategy. 4 scored between 1.00 - 3.50, 1 scored between 3.51 – 5.50 and 1 scored between 5.51 – 6.50. The schools whose performance was in the good performing category scored between 6.51 – 8.50 did not use avoiding strategy.

The findings of this study corroborate those of Kimani and Chawana (2002) who affirmed that strategic avoidance was settlement by chance and was therefore unpopular. Furthermore it supports Kalagbor and Nnokam (2015) who concluded that avoiding strategy is in most cases risky and influences both safety situation of the school environment and has negative impact on students" academic achievements.

Some of the Principals who chose to ignore had found the students demands as impossible and believed that the students would withdraw from the conflict with time. A principal who use avoiding strategy as a means of maintaining peace between him and students is not visionery. No one who wants to achieve school objectives encourage avoiding as a strategy. Avoiding to resolve issues affecting learners within school has negative effects if used limitlessly. Among the selected schools, some of them used avoiding and there was unprecedented peace. In the longrun it was detrimental to learners as observed by some teachers. On the positive side, there was no visible effects since shool administration did not confront students in an attemt to resolve conflicts. It was viewed as an assumption of the demands of the students who may feel neglected leading to students low self esteem.

3.3 Impact of Collaborating strategy of conflict resolution on Academic performance in secondary schools in Narok County

In general, 59.1% of the teachers stated that their principals in Narok County practiced collaborating strategy in conflict resolution while 78.1% of the principals in Narok County often employ collaborating strategy in conflict resolution. Majority of the principals who use collaborating strategy to resolve conflicts perform between 6.51 – 8.50. Schools that did not use the strategy scored below mean score of 3.5.

This finding was found to be consistent with those of Van Dou (2004) that collaboration was considered as the most efficient strategy of conflict administration since the core plan there was to cooperate in order to fix the conflict permanently.

3.4 Impact of competing on Academic performance in schools in Narok County
On average, 62.6% of the teachers in Narok County were of the opinion that their principals employ competing strategy in conflict management while 58.9% of the principals in Narok County employ competing strategy as a means of managing conflicts. A 66.7% of the principals whose schools performed between 2 and 4 agreed to be using competing style of conflict management. All the principals whose mean score was between 4 and 6 agreed to be using competitive style of managing conflict although not entirely relying on it.

In this study the researcher found out that even the principals whose schools performed between 8 and 10 still applied 16% of competition as a mode of conflict management though they use it together with other styles. When this method is entirely used by school principals, it is likely to cause hostility, unrest or even death in the school. This may have a negative impact on the students' academic performance due to the chaos in the institution. This shows that use of competing as a conflict management style alone impacts negatively on academic performance hence the reason for below average performance in most of the schools in Narok County.

3.5 Influence of compromising strategy of conflict resolution on Academic performance in secondary schools in Narok County

In general, 62.9% of the teachers in Narok County stated that their principals usually employ compromising as a conflict management strategy while 53.1% of the principals in Narok stated that they usually employ compromising as a conflict management strategy. Thirty six schools representing 56.3% of the sampled schools use compromising strategy to resolve conflicts. 23.5% (8) of the schools scored between 1.00 - 3.50, 20.6% (7) of them scored between 3.51 – 5.50, 26.5% (9) scored between 5.51 – 6.50 and only 30.6% (11) scored between 6.51 – 8.50.

This agrees with the findings by Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppy and Leibert (2006) that compromising strategy upholds students" performance
The use of compromising style demonstrates that you are willing to sacrifice some of your goals while persuading others to give up part of their goals. The downside of compromising is that it can be an easy way out and reduces new creative options that may worsen the conflict.

4.0 Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of conflict resolution strategies on learners' academic performance in public secondary schools in Narok County, Kenya. As illustrated in the findings, it is evident that strategies used to resolve conflicts indeed influence academic performance of students. Majority of the respondents gave similar reaction to the questions and statements given in the questionnaires. The researcher concluded that the findings were dependable. It was realized that accommodating strategy influence academic performance positively.

When this strategy is used learners feel recognized by the school administration. Accommodating enhance better leadership in school. This will help to minimize the failures in academic performance. Furthermore, accommodating enhance relationship between learners and school administration. It develops a sense of responsibility by both parties involved to the benefit of the students. Avoiding strategy as portrayed by the results, is destructive. Principals who used this strategy were only six out of the sixty-four sampled schools Representing 9.4%. Four schools that used avoiding strategy scored between 1.00 - 3.50, whereas those whose performance was good stated that they did not use avoiding strategy. When a conflict is avoided the students might become

emotional and cause more harm. Avoiding or retreating from a conflict requires no courage or kindness for the other party. By avoiding the conflict, school administration pretend that it never happened or doesn't exist. Principals who avoided stated that they withdrew and pretended that there is nothing wrong. It may not be felt in the short run but after some time the effects become manifest through unpleasant performance. Avoiding strategy may make learners feel neglected and will develop low esteem. This researcher concluded that principals in sampled schools in Narok County use the five conflict management styles. The teachers and the principals established that all the strategies are applied and that none of them used a single conflict resolution style in the management of their schools.

However a high percentage of principals (78%) agreed that there is use of collaboration style as a technique of conflict management. Most of those schools whose principals relied a lot on competitive, compromising and accommodating strategies in managing their school conflicts had a mean score of between 3.51- 8.50 and while those whose principals used avoiding had a mean score of between 1.00 -3.50. This may have a lot to do with the low academic performance of the secondary schools in Narok County. There is also a high percentage of schools which their principals use both compromising and accommodating methods of conflict management. These methods if not used cautiously may have unpleasant influence on the academic performance of the students in these schools .This was concluded by the researcher as the origin of dismal performance in the county.

While all the conflict strategies discussed above are significant to the academic performance in public secondary schools, they imply that if they are to be contributing positively in facilitating academic performance, they must be targeted towards educational agenda. Conflict administration training is essential to warrant schools better academic performance under the lookout of mutual deliberation along with stakeholders. Providing a flourishing agenda on conflict management shapes an immense beginning in the management growth. The Kenyan government ought to train school administrators on how to handle conflicts in schools by crafting inclusive guidelines that equip the principals in conflict management a compulsory in order to encourage principals. Students-administration conflicts may be ignited by a number of factors. School principals as overseers, are expected to innovatively resolve conflicts in their schools. The series of challenges which the schools undergo depends on conflict resolution strategy that the school administration employs to carry out their regular running of the school. For the success of the schools, principals must effectiveness chart, manage, harmonize, express and organize the schools activities taking into consideration the opinions of students.

5.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following;

Principals in Narok County should not use avoiding strategy to resolve conflicts. Those who did not use this strategy scored highly. Principals in Narok County ought to use collaboration as a method of settling conflicts in their schools so as to improve academic performance. Competing strategy should not be used if secondary schools in Narok County are to progress in academic performance. Principals who use accommodating method of solving conflicts must do so cautiously to avoid being misunderstood in their administration which later may influence the academic performance negatively. He/she might be taken to be lenient and unable to control the students. Constant use of compromising strategy as a way of settling disputes can lead to poor results and so principals in Narok County should not depend so much on this conflict management style but use also the other styles effectively to get better results in the school.

6.0 Suggestions for further Research

The researcher found out that there was needed to do further research on the topics such as:

Influence of strategies of resolving conflicts on students' academic performance in private secondary schools. Influence of conflict between teachers and school administration on students' academic performance.

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