

PEACE INITIATIVE PROGRAMMES BY STUDENT WELFARE DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IN MANAGING STUDENT CONFLICTS IN KENYAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

A major challenge facing student affairs' administration is management of students' conflicts. Students' in Kenyan public universities inadvertently resort to rioting and destructive behavior to resolve their conflicts. This has been detrimental to the teaching and learning environment. The rationale for this study was to examine the types of peace initiative programmes in Kenyan public universities and their effectiveness in managing students' conflicts. The study utilized the evaluation and correlational research designs. The study respondents were 478 students, 25 key respondents and 40 participants in focused group discussions sampled from five public universities in Kenya. Qualitative data was thematically analyzed while quantitative data was inferentially analyzed using the chi-square test for correlation and independence. The study established that, peace initiative programmes are varied in type and effectiveness. The Chi-Square test showed that there was a highly significant association between activeness of peace initiative programmes and achievement of their objectives. Further, although 60 percent of the students felt that peace initiative programmes had met their objectives and had an overall positive impact in benefitting students' in the areas of handling conflicts constructively, the programmes lacked specific guidelines for evaluating and monitoring their effectiveness. The study concluded that the peace initiative programs benefited students in areas of handling conflicts constructively. The study recommends that peace initiative programmes need to be integrated as one of the core activities in the student welfare department. This would create more opportunities to actively involve the whole student body in the peace initiative programmes in order to enhance a positive campus climate conducive for serious scholarly work. (260 Words)

Key Words: Peace initiative programmes, student welfare departments, student conflicts, effectiveness, conflict management.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Kenya's student service professionals face four major challenges: the increasing costs of attendance, the resulting impact on student behaviour and actions, lack of training and senior leadership, and regular campus closures (Yakaboski and Birnbaum, 2013). According to the Public Universities Inspection Board (PUIB) Report of the Committee on Student Affairs (2006), orientation of new students by the Student Welfare department was inadequate and even some of the topics covered were irrelevant and a waste of time. It is not clear whether peace initiative programmes by student welfare departments have influenced the management of students' conflicts. Little is written about student services in Kenya's universities that does not focus primarily on student unrest. It has been observed that students' crisis is becoming more rampant in the tertiary institutions and the resultant consequences have been to the detriment of the teaching and learning atmosphere (Adeyemi, Ekundaya and Alonge, 2010). The few accounts focus mostly on basic student services such as accommodation, food and counseling (Hughes, 1990). The influence of peace initiative programmes on managing students' conflicts formed the subject of discussion for this study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

A paucity of research exists to inform the influence of peace initiative programmes for the management of students' conflicts in higher learning. According to Amani Communities' Africa (2010), a baseline survey on seven Kenyan public universities revealed that the main administrative methods of resolving conflicts are expulsions, suspensions, admonitions and counseling to a very small extent. Management of students' conflicts has not been well documented (Etadon, 2013). Few studies have been carried out on conflict management styles in Kenya's higher institutions of learning (Okoth, 2014). This study was designed to bridge the knowledge gap by identifying the types of peace initiative programmes and their influence on management of students' conflicts. Further, Public Universities in Kenya have neither clear conflict management and resolution policy guidelines and procedures in place nor credible mechanisms for monitoring student unrest in their respective campuses (Matemba, 2009). Student riots and destructive demonstrations in Kenyan public universities persist amidst existing peace initiative programmes. At the heart of the existing model of student services is the ever present and legitimate concern that students will riot again (Yakaboski & Birnbaum, 2013). There is limited relevant and up-to-date documented information on these initiatives prompting an inquiry on their influence in managing students' conflicts in campus environments and enabling the university meets its obligations to individuals and the nation. The study provides evidence based decisions for improving conflict management. This gap in knowledge was the focus of the study.

1.3 Research Question

The study was guided by the question: which peace initiative programmes have student welfare departments in Kenyan public universities put in place and what objectives have they achieved?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

In spite of wide spread interest in violence prevention and conflict resolution in schools, there seems to be a need for much more discussion in educational journals and at professional education society meetings about peace building in schools (Harris and Morrison, 2012). Studies suggest 20% of students (3 to 4 students per class) currently display disruptive behaviour to such a degree that

typical functioning is impaired (Brauner and Stephens, 2006; Satcher, 2004)). Lapitun (2005) found that most of the school principals (97%) in Indonesia believed that counseling was one of the strategies that were effective in preventing and solving peer conflict. It is also believed to improve the relationship among students and promote peace in schools. The main concern however, is how to conduct counseling that is effective in solving peer conflicts among adolescents.

Despite the establishment of counseling programmes in higher educational institutions by the Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education, students in these institutions continue to manifest maladaptive behaviors such as rioting, alcohol and drug abuse, vandalism, theft, and general indiscipline (Koech Report, 1999; Mwangi, 2003 and Siringi, 2003). Recent studies on guidance and counseling in educational institutions in Kenya such as Kipinsu (2001), and Moraa (2008) have focused on secondary school students and not tertiary institutions of learning. There is a gap in institutions of higher learning hence achieving the goals of peace initiative programmes in higher learning remain indicators of the effectiveness of these programmes and thus the need for assessment.

Several peace initiative programmes have been set in place with varied degrees of success. Ongoma (2008) and, Wango and Mugai (2007) state that peer counselors can help answer some questions that are outside the experience of a teacher or parent. Attempt to have elements of conflict management in some university courses such as the Diploma in HIV/AIDS is another initiative. This however cannot be said to embrace the whole universities curriculum taken by students. Further, research has not established the impact of peer mediation programs in institutions of higher education levels or addressed the comparative advantages of curricular integration and peer mediation training in terms of positive impacts for students or the larger school environment (Jones, 1998).

While email and internet may have increased organizational performance they have also added new types of conflict (Ford, 2003). For example, “warblogs” and “peaceblogs” can be used to explore peace and conflict resolution via engaging students in the reading and synthesizing of narratives of others (Oravec, 2004). Although the authors tend to present perceived positive results that can emerge through the use of technology; empirical investigations to evaluate such outcomes are scarce.

The past decade has seen rapid growth in both research and practice of what is generally called and labeled in its broadest sense as sport for development and peace (SDP) (Schrag, 2012). Sports for peace goals are multifaceted, complement other peace building strategies, and sometimes compliment other SDP sub-area goals (Schrag, 2012). SPD however cannot in itself solve conflicts, but should be used as a tool for preventing violence, ethnic and regional tensions, and war (Vasili, 2010). These, among others are peace initiatives put in place towards conflict management in public universities in Kenya. This study sought to establish their effectiveness in managing the students’ conflicts.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The study considered Humans Needs Theory and Conflict Management Theory relevant in explaining the need for universities to address students’ conflicts and initiate varied peace initiative programmes. According to Fisher (2000), human needs theory assumes that deep rooted conflict is caused by un-met or frustrated basic needs, physical, psychological and social. Applying this theory in evaluating peace initiative programmes in public universities explained the need to empower the

conflicting parties to identify and implement peace initiative programmes that can resolve their unmet needs.

Conflict Management Theory regards solving such conflicts as unrealistic, and argues that conflicts can only be managed, contained and a compromise may occasionally be reached. The assumption here is that conflicts are irresolvable and that handling them is limited to containing and ending the violence (Hamad, Ahmed & Azam ,2005). The interplay of other intervening variables such as combined participation of students in the peace initiative programmes, involvement of student welfare staff in training, facilitation, problem solving and encouraging dialogue plus university management support contribute to the effectiveness of the peace initiative programmes to resolve students' conflicts. Peace initiative programmes are expected to significantly influence the management of students' conflicts.

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The study utilized the Evaluation and Correlational Research Designs to examine the types of peace initiative programmes by student welfare departments and their influence in managing students' conflicts in Kenyan public universities. Questions were drawn to determine the presence of the varied peace initiative programmes and the extent to which stated objectives had been met. The analyzed data focused on responses from 478 students, 25 key informants and 40 participants of focus group discussions sampled from five Kenyan public universities. The students made a self-assessment of the influence of peace initiative programmes in managing student conflicts while student welfare staff validated the data from the students' responses by giving their opinions on the performance of the peace initiative programmes in managing student conflicts.

Using secondary data gave the researcher access to otherwise unavailable organizations, individuals and university documents on the management of students' conflicts. This enhanced the measurement of the influence of the peace initiative programmes in managing student conflicts. Correlational research involves collecting data in order to determine whether and to what degree a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables. The degree of relationship was further corroborated by determining in quantitative terms the existence of the degree of relationship between the peace initiative programmes and achievement of their objectives. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically in relation to the research objective while quantitative data was analyzed inferentially using Chi-square test for correlations and independence.

3.1 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study findings are discussed indicating the types of peace initiatives and their influence in managing student conflicts. Pearson Chi-square test was run to ascertain the association between the two variables.

3.1.1 Peer mediation and acquisition of conflict management skills

Pearson-Square value ($\chi^2_{16,0.01} = 68.687$) showed that there was highly significant ($P < 0.01$) association between activeness of Peer mediation in the university and students acquisition of skills in conflict management and resolution as shown in Figure 1. Among the respondents, 209 (43.7%) of the students strongly agreed that due to the activeness of peer mediation, student leaders were able to identify situations that warn of student unrest and respond appropriately due to having acquired conflict management skills against 77 (16.1%) who disagreed. The study revealed that peer mediation was active and enabled students acquire skills in conflict management and resolution.

This finding concurs with Burton (2000) that integrating conflict resolution into the pre-service and in-service curricula improves individual conflict resolution skills. In addition to this, research results also indicate that this approach to conflict training not only enables students to learn, use and develop more positive attitude towards conflict resolution, but also enhances academic achievement (Jones,1998; Onsarigo,2000; and Stevahn, 2004). Peer mediation had therefore significantly influenced the students' ability to manage their conflicts through interactions amongst themselves and taking initiative to address their issues.

3.1.2 Peace clubs and students demonstrations and riots

Pearson Chi-Square value ($\chi^2_{16,0.01} = 80.007$) showed that there was highly significant ($P < 0.01$) association between activeness of peace clubs in the university and reduced student demonstrations and riots. As shown in Figure 2, 225(47.1%) responded that activeness of peace clubs reduced student demonstrations and riots while 58 (12.1%) responded not active. Previous riots and demonstrations left a lot of destruction in their wake. This concurs with (Baker and Gerler, 2000) who reported that students who participated in school guidance and counseling programmes had significantly less inappropriate behaviors towards school than those who did not participate in the programme. While the positive influence is centred on the students, a noteworthy finding is that the university administrators have significantly reduced their budgets on repairs that were previously incurred by destructions of property caused by student riots. In the interviews, it was revealed by one of the Chaplains that the university had considerably reduced their budget from Kenya Shillings 10 Million to 1.7 Million.

3.1.3 Mentorship programmes and self-awareness

Results from Figure 3 indicate that 224(46.9%) of the students responded that mentorship programmes were active and had increased self-awareness amongst students against 75 (15.7%) who responded not active. Pearson Chi-Square value ($\chi^2_{16,0.01} = 96.248$) showed that there was highly significant ($P < 0.01$) association between activeness of mentorship programs in the university and increased self-awareness among students.

With increased self-awareness, more students were shunning violence and embracing the use of dialogue and negotiation. Negative ethnicity has been gradually diminishing as is evident by the changed patterns of voting during student elections. This finding concurs with Day- Vines *et al* (1996) findings that peer mediation can put socially inhibited students in contact with other students, "bringing them out of their shell". This means that, self-awareness enhances social cohesion because once students are in- touch with their inner self and begin to appreciate the need to resolve conflicts peacefully, this subsequently creates conditions conducive to peace within the student body. A significant contrasting finding is that this study negates Mulaeh (2007) rating of tribalism as the highest among the casual factors of violence amongst students. The study rather suggests that due to increased self-awareness amongst students, tribalism has considerably reduced in significance due to increased engagement of students in peace activities that has increased their self-awareness and appreciation for diversity.

3.1.4 Guidance and Counseling and decrease in behavioral referrals to Dean of Students

Out of 478 respondents, 190 (39.7%) of the students responded that Guidance and counseling was active and had resulted in a decrease in behavioral referrals to the Dean of students while 42(8.8%) responded not active as depicted in Figure 4 .Pearson Chi-Square value ($\chi^2_{16,0.01} = 43.382$) showed that there was highly significant ($P < 0.01$) association between activeness of Guidance and

counseling programmes in the university and decrease in behavioral referrals to the Dean of Students. The activeness of Guidance and counseling is attributed to the increased threat of alcohol and substance abuse in our Kenyan public universities. Johnson *et. al.*, (2001) observed that, untrained students by and large use conflict strategies that create destructive outcomes by ignoring the importance of ongoing relationships. They further assert that students' success in resolving their conflicts constructively tends to result in reduction of the number of student-student conflicts referred to teachers and administrators, which in turn, tends to reduce suspensions. K'Okul (2010) attributes students riots in public universities to ineffective Guidance and counseling services, while in contrast, this study rated Guidance and counseling the most active peace initiative programme, that has considerably helped reduce the number of behavioral referrals emanating from students' conflicts referred to the Dean of Students.

3.1.5 Peer Counseling programmes and peaceful student elections

Results from Figure 5 indicate that 192(40.2%) of the students indicated that activities of the Peer counseling programmes had also effectively resulted to relatively peaceful student elections while 59 (12.3%) indicated not active. Pearson Chi-Square value ($\chi^2_{16,0.01} = 114.1$) showed that there a highly significant ($P < 0.01$) association between activeness of Peer counseling programs in the university and peaceful student elections. This may be attributed to the training of Student leaders for responsible student leadership. From the focus group discussions, the study revealed that the issue of peaceful student elections was very critical and a major concern for students involved in peace initiative programmes. University student elections tend to mirror the scenario in the local national political arena. Student elections have been marred by external interference from influential politicians some of whom were former student leaders. This view is in line with sentiments made by Goolam Mohamedbhai, former Secretary General of Association of African Universities (The World View, 2010). Information derived from document analysis revealed that Civic education that is carried out by students in peace initiative programmes has positively impacted on student elections which have now become more peaceful and less destructive over the years.

3.1.6 Round Tables for peace and Establishment of Guidelines for Managing Student Conflicts

From Figure 6, 168 (35.1%) of the students responded that Round tables for peace forums were active and had contributed to the establishment of guidelines for the management of students' conflicts whereas 88 (18.4%) responded not active. Pearson Chi-Square value ($\chi^2_{16,0.01} = 56.58$) showed that there was highly significant ($P < 0.01$) association between activeness of Roundtables for peace forums in the university and established guidelines for the management of students' conflicts.

The relative response from the students is an indication that while peace initiative programmes may be ongoing in the universities, there is no clarity on established guidelines for the management of students' conflicts. Bickmore (2000) reiterates that, relating mediation to discipline policy was also crucial. School based initiatives were more successful when they developed and communicated to all staff members a clear, non-coercive policy regarding the prerequisites, consequences and procedures for using peer mediation as distinct from more top- down procedures. Behfar, *et. al.*, (2008) equally reiterated that when communication is ineffective, miscommunication and misunderstanding could create a conflict where parties may have different perception as to what the facts are in a particular situation, and, until they share information and clarify their perceptions, resolution is impossible. Therefore, it is very essential to have clear guidelines for effective communication.

3.1.7 Peer Mediation and enhanced Students leaders skills in conflict Management

From Figure 7, 198 (41.4%) of the students reported that activeness of Peer mediation programmes had enhanced Student leaders ability to identify situations that warn of student unrest while 91 (19.0%) responded not active. The calculated Pearson Chi-Square value ($\chi^2_{16,0.01} = 60.396$) showed that there was highly significant ($P < 0.01$) association between activeness of Peer mediation in the university and ability of Students leaders to identify situations that warn of student unrest. This has enhanced the level of reporting early warning signs which has been a major hindrance in containing students' conflicts.

This finding concurs with studies on youth development that have shown that adolescent acquisition of positive social skills can help to prevent and deter future engagement in problematic behaviours, such as criminal and or violent behavior and truancy from school (Mahoney *et al*, 2001; Marsh and Kleitman, 2001) . Peer mediation therefore, encourages students to be more open in there interactions and are open to warning of any signs of student unrest that are foreseen to disrupt smooth learning.

3.1.8 Workshops for Good Governance and student generated solutions

An average of 171 (35.8%) students responded that Workshops on good governance were active and had brought about an increase in student generated solutions unlike 113 (23.6%) who responded not active as shown in Figure 8. Pearson Chi-Square value ($\chi^2_{16,0.01} = 83.514$) showed that there was highly significant ($P < 0.01$) association between activeness of Workshops on good governance programs in the university and increase in student generated solutions. There was enhanced peace and better discipline reported by the students' welfare staff. Student councils were notably more accountable and transparent in their dealings with the student body by posting their annual budgets and expenditure on the notice boards. Security officers reported reduced incidences of theft amongst students and improved respect for private property.

From the focus group discussions, the study revealed that, the peace initiative programmes had encouraged students to be proactive and come up with innovative means and ways of solving their problems. For instance, at the University of Nairobi, members of the peace Club had created a website in which they had drawn up a schedule of activities they were to undertake every fortnight.

At Egerton University, in order to enhance peaceful co-existence between students and inhabitants of the university environs in the neighboring community, students in peace initiative programmes engage in charity works by visiting Charity homes and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps to donate clothing and foodstuff outsourced from themselves and well-wishers. At Kenyatta University, Talk Shows are very popular where students discuss pertinent issues affecting them and come up with proposed solutions for consideration by the university management.

3.1.9 Games for peace and use of counseling services

Looking at Figure 9, a total of 179 (37.4%) of the students responded that Games for peace programmes were active and had influenced the increased use of counseling services while 81 (16.9%) responded not active. Pearson Chi-Square value ($\chi^2_{16,0.05} = 15.076$) showed that there was no significant ($P > 0.05$) association between activeness of Games for peace days programs in the university and increased use of counseling services. Rao (2003) ascertains that many institutions in Kenya, have not attained the ideal counselor versus student ratio and many are in the process of achieving this standard. This may explain why an increase in number of student counselors for consultation, may avail students more opportunity to consult a counselor and therefore the

registered increase. The increased use of counseling services may be attributed to increased staff student ratio. While counseling had been shunned by students, its benefits have been evident over the years with reduced student dropouts, better interpersonal relationships in the hostels and increased female participation in extracurricular activities. This finding is contrary to the view of the Public University Inspection Board (PUIB) (2006) that in public universities, counseling services are grossly underutilized due to a general misconception with some regarding it as psychiatric treatment. Increased awareness and reactivity of the student welfare department has been instrumental in this direction.

3.1.10 Publishing of peace newsletter and student disputes

From the study, 139 (29.1%) of students responded that the publishing of Peace newsletters was active and had contributed to a reduction in student disputes while 117 (24.5%) responded not active as shown in Figure 10. Pearson Chi-Square value ($\chi^2_{16,0.01} = 43.223$) showed that there was highly significant ($P < 0.01$) association between activeness of Peace newsletters in the university and reduction in student disputes. This ranged from fights during drinking sprees, theft amongst themselves, issues of relationships and money laundering. Peace newsletters, create a forum for students to blend their diverse views on conflict management of various issues which strengthens their efforts in peace building. The peace initiative programmes had enhanced the co-existence amongst students from all walks of life subsequently reducing student disputes.

3.1.11 Active types of peace initiative programmes in Kenyan public universities

Among the thirteen (13) listed types of peace initiative programmes in Kenya public universities, Guidance and Counseling programme was viewed as the most active as shown in Figure 11. The activeness of peace initiative programme is depicted from the percentage responses totaling 379 (82.2%) for Guidance and Counseling. Peer counseling ranked second 363 (77.41%), Peace clubs ranked third 282 (60.9%), Mentorship programs ranked fourth 267 (58.8%), Peer mediation ranked fifth 239 (52.2%) while Student Union Organization ranked sixth 228 (49.6%). On the other hand, Workshops on Good Governance, Peace cultural days, Round tables for peace forum, Games for peace, Exchange visits with other institutions, Peace Newsletters and Student District Association Peace Initiatives were perceived to be not very active by less than 40% of the respondents. The presence of unspecified clubs and societies plus religious groups like the Christian Union was noted by the researcher which is an indication that there are many active groups involved in peace initiative programmes whose presence is either not acknowledged or recognized.

4.1 Summary

The general consensus was that the peace initiative programmes have had an overall positive impact on interactions between students by enhancing the management of students' conflicts. They were more open and able to use problem solving strategies in small groups. This reduced time spent on resolving student conflicts and increased staff time to address other pressing welfare issues. Triangulation of data using interviews, FGD, document analysis and observation check list revealed that there was high participation rates in peace initiative programmes where there were "goodies" to be offered. These included stipends, refreshments, T-shirts and certificates. The peace initiative programmes provide students with knowledge about consequences of violent behavior in the hope that they will make wise decisions to avoid self-destructive activities in their own lives. The expectation is that when they learn constructive ways to address conflicts that lead to violence, the incidence and intensity of violent confrontations will diminish.

4.2 Conclusions

The implementation and evaluation of the peace initiative programmes by the students' welfare department staff did not come out clear. Nevertheless, the findings point to the fact that peace initiative programmes benefit students in the areas of handling conflicts themselves constructively. Some authors believe that students should be involved in planning and implementing peace mediation programs. Others further feel that students should even get evolved in the training process. The researcher notes that, integrating peace initiative programmes and conflict management training into university curricular would go a long way in training the whole student body on conflict management skills such as dialogue as a non-violent skill of communication in handling student conflicts.

4.3 Recommendations

The peace initiative programmes need to be integrated as one of the core activities in the students' welfare departments over the course of the year in terms of enhanced funding to allow for more activities throughout the academic calendar year as opposed to a one activity per academic year or session. This will create the opportunity to involve more students actively in the peace initiative programmes.

4.4 Suggestions for Further Research

There is need for further research on a comparative study on why Guidance and Counseling programmes are more active than other peace initiative programmes across institutions to enhance number of students engaged in peace initiative programmes.

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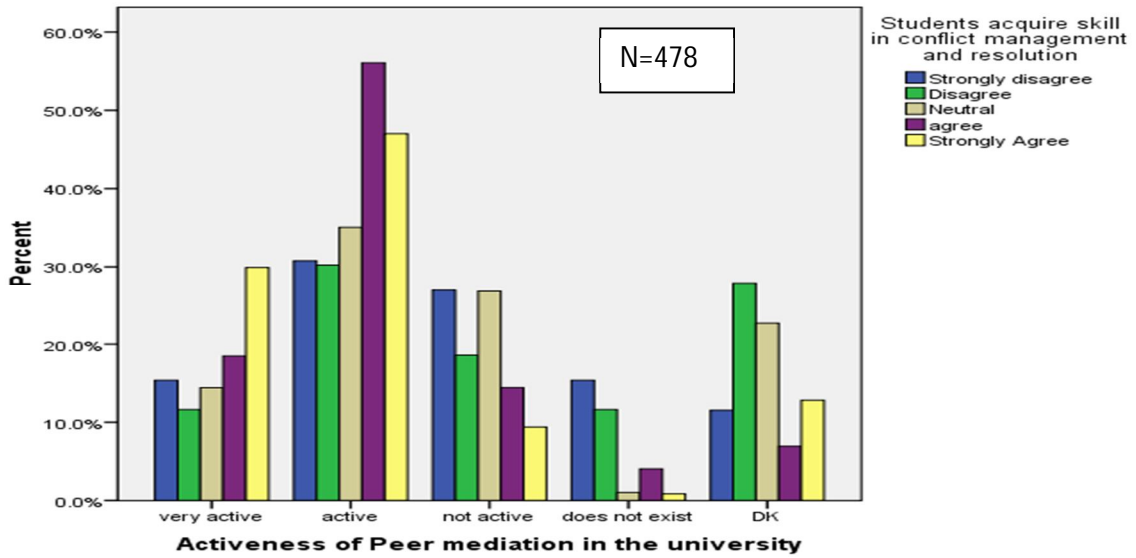


Figure 1: Percentage responses of students acquiring skills in conflict management and resolution in Kenyan public universities

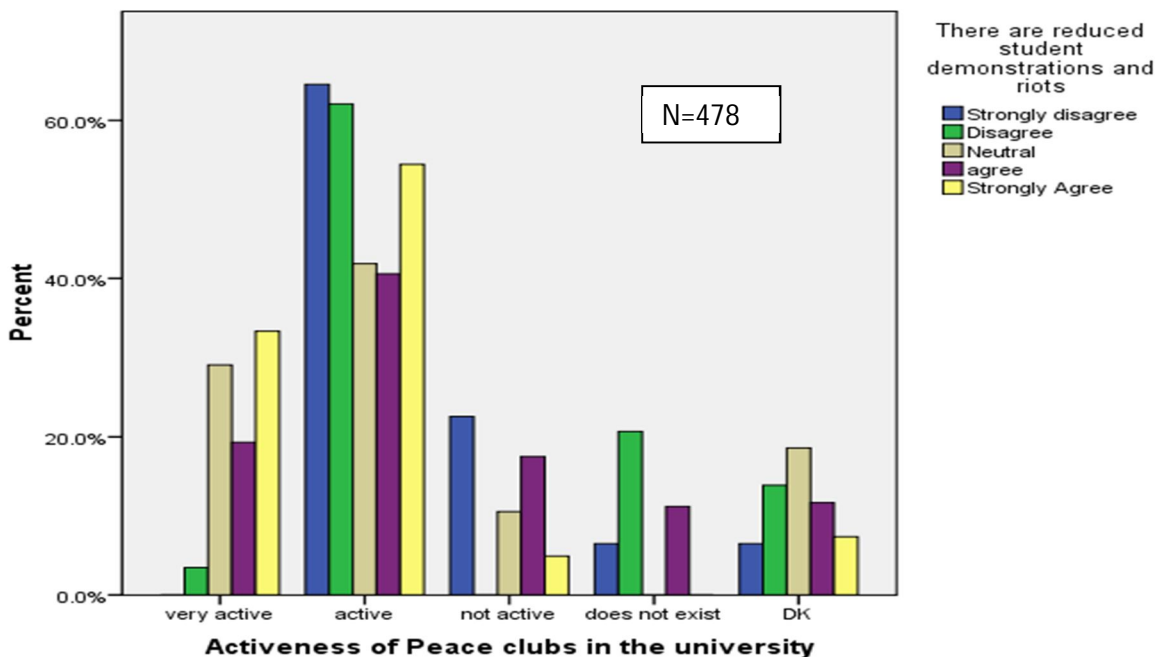


Figure 2: Percentage responses of reduced student demonstrations and riot

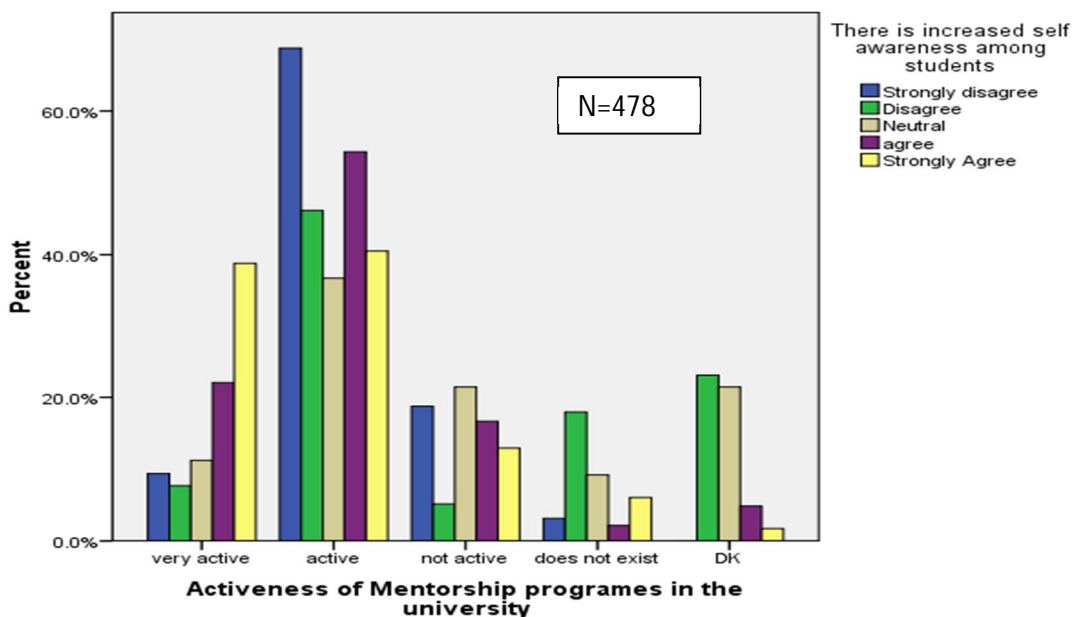


Figure 3: Percentage response of increased self-awareness amongst students in Kenyan public universities

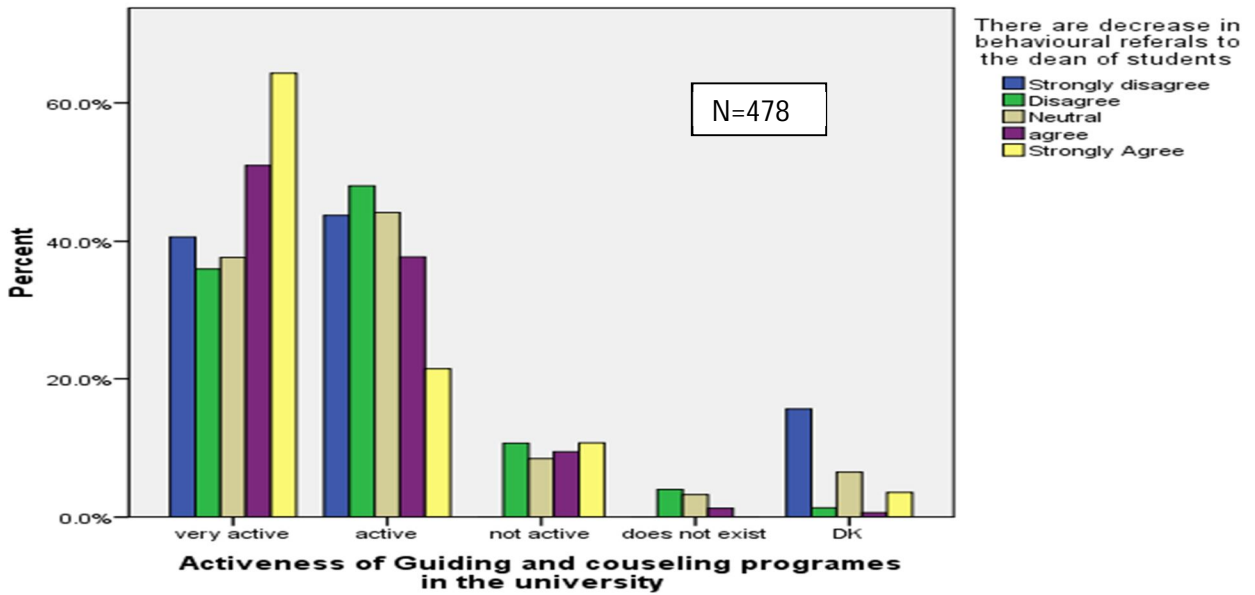


Figure 4: Percentage response of overall decrease in behavioural referrals to the Dean of students in Kenya in Kenyan public universities

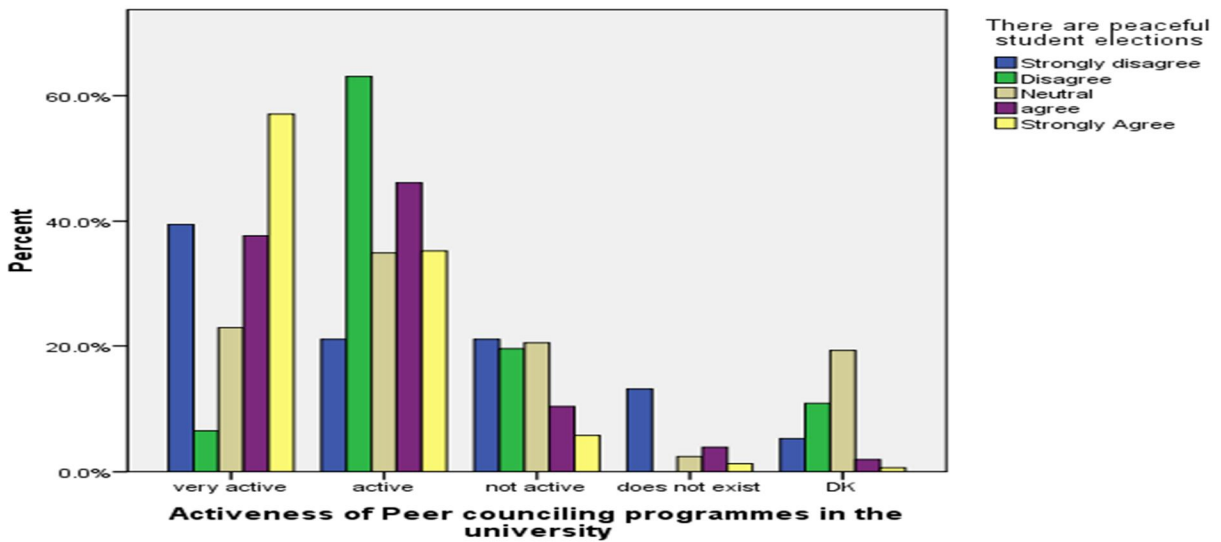


Figure 5: Percentage responses of peaceful student elections in Kenyan public universities

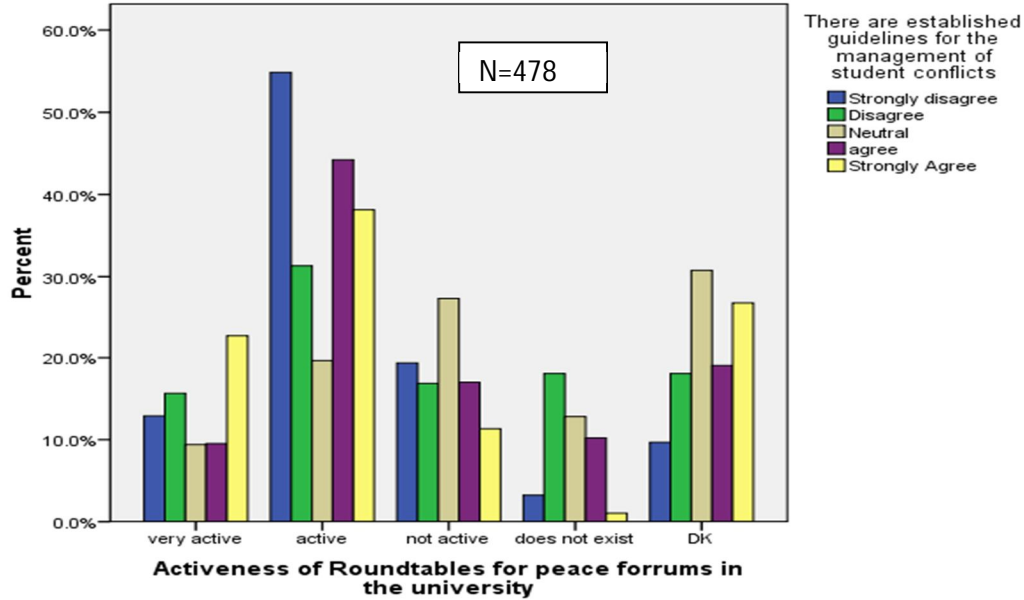


Figure 6: Percentage response of the presence of established guidelines for the management of student conflicts in Kenyan public universities

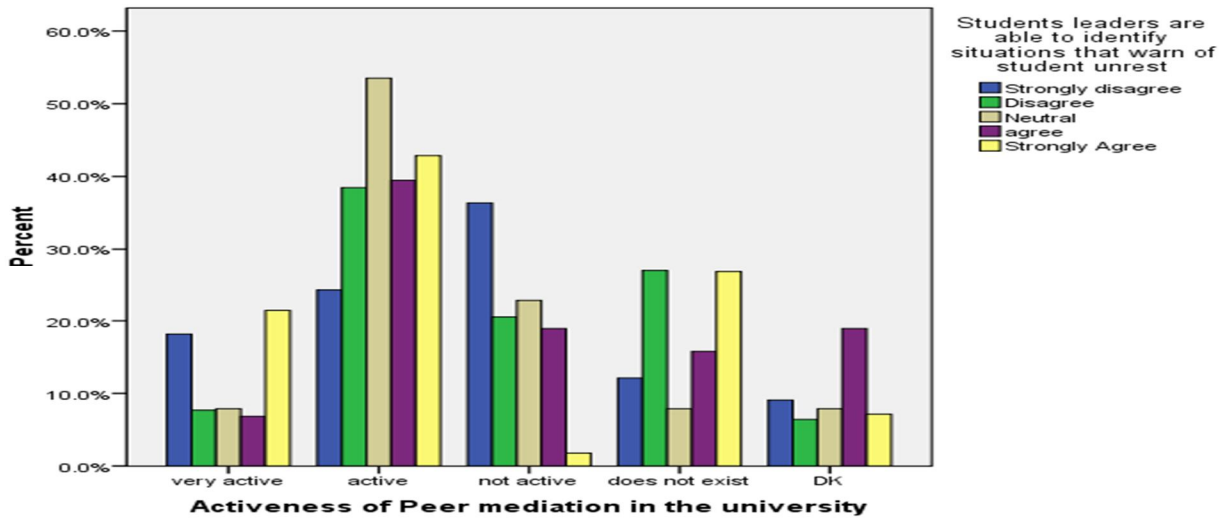


Figure 7: Percentage response of student leaders' ability to identify situations that warn of student unrest in Kenyan public universities

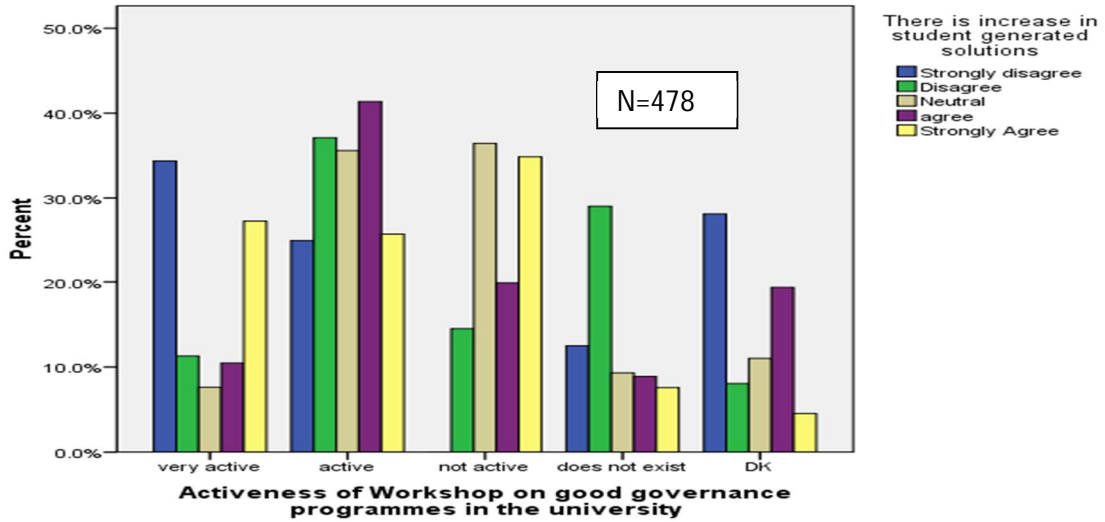


Figure 8 : Percentage response of increase in student generated solutions

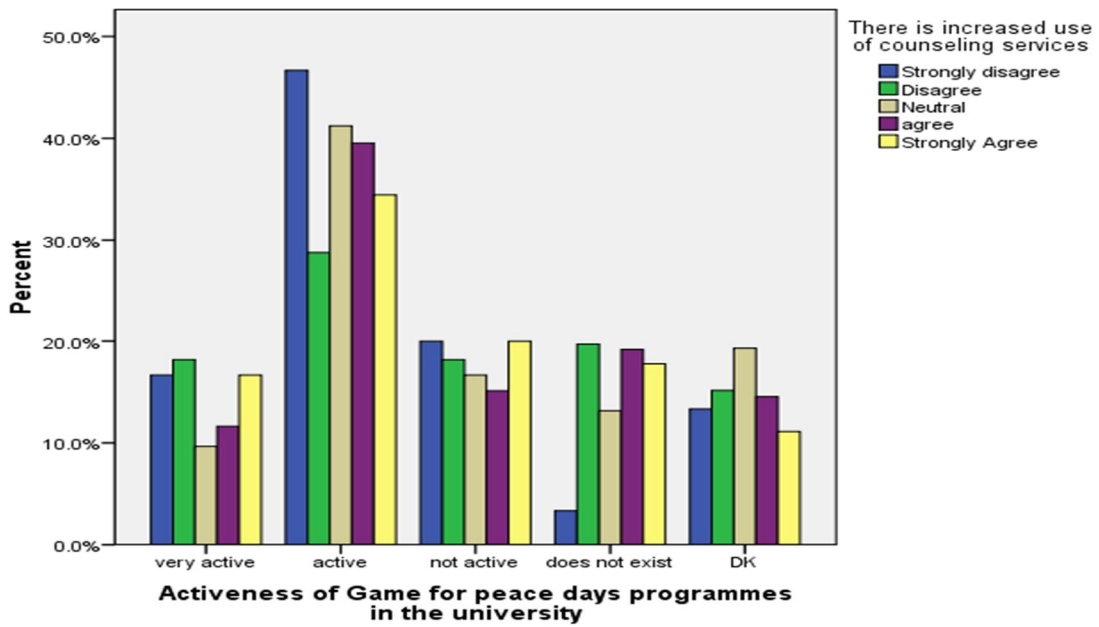


Figure 9: Percentage response of increased use of counseling services

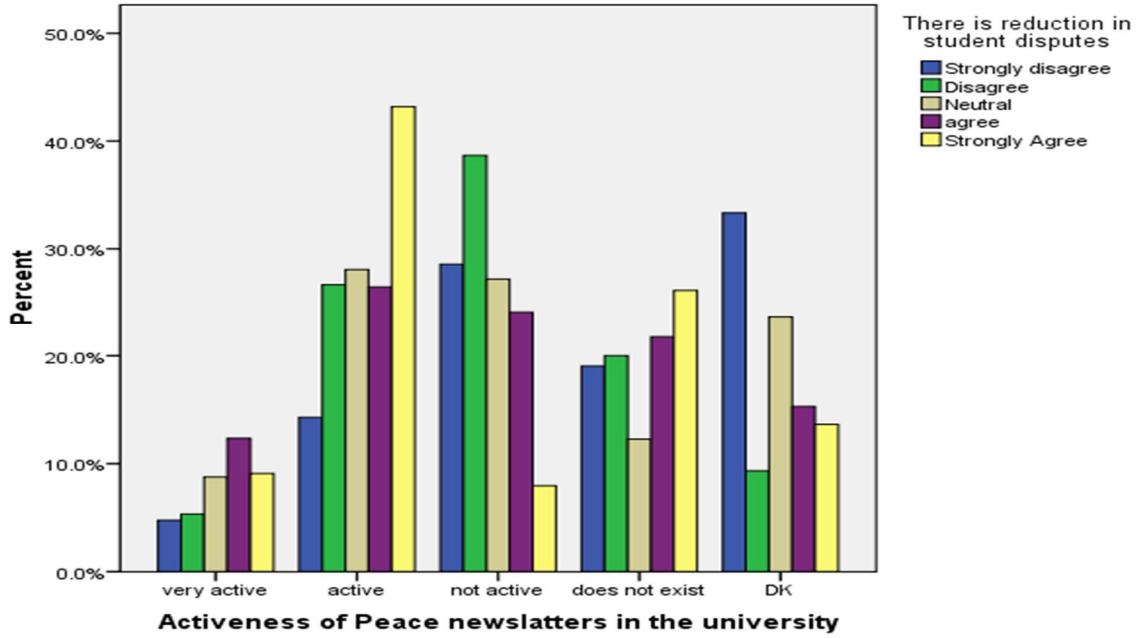


Figure 10: Percentage response of reduction in student disputes in Kenyan public universities

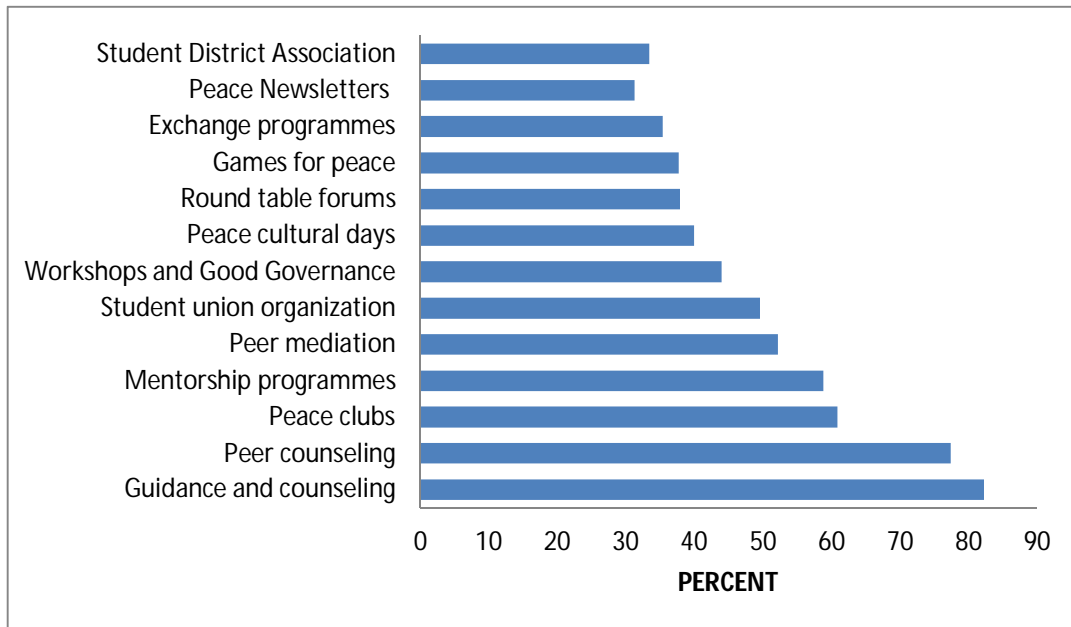


Figure 11: Active types of peace initiative programs in Kenyan public universities