

**A SURVEY ON CONFLICTS IN KENYA'S SECONDARY SCHOOL AND ITS  
IMPLICATION ON SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION: A CASE STUDY OF PRACTICING  
TEACHERS UNDERTAKING MASTERS DEGREE IN EDUCATION  
AT MOUNT KENYA UNIVERSITY**

Dr. Mary Mugwe  
Mount Kenya University - P.O. BOX 342 – 01000  
Thika – Kenya  
Email: [marychui@yahoo.com](mailto:marychui@yahoo.com)

**ABSTRACT**

Management role of school administrator is paramount since there are the one who are involved in running day to day affairs of respective schools, although they still have other roles which includes supervisory, financial management, school ambassador who create harmonious environment between all stakeholders involved in running schools, guiding and counselling and motivating teachers, offering leadership in school, ensuring instructional quality while ensuring school safety among others. With that in mind schools management must be prepared to confront conflict in workplace which arises and is shaped by unique aspects of environment, leadership styles and challenges within and without. The thrust of this research paper is to establish school conflict and how it affects school management. The paper will try to analyse various types of conflicts in work place where as was reviewed in the literature such there are categorised depending on the nature of the conflicts which includes work relationship conflicts, task conflicts, structural conflicts and the goal conflicts , with the paper similarly focusing in how each of these conflict affect the school management. The researcher undertook to fill this gap by seeking the views of the teachers, head teachers and the various principals who take continuous education during holidays, currently undertaking Masters in school of education Mount Kenya, University located in the main campus at Thika. During the time of the research, there were 220 students in school of education and administration students at Mount Kenya University on August holiday who were 220 in number from all over the country. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with Pearson correlation used to establish extent to which school conflicts affect school management whereby the final data was presented in form of frequency tables, charts and graphs. Among the key findings was that the most frequent type of conflict that is found in most schools are connected with tasks as indicated by 66% of the respondents which is followed by structural (60%).The structural conflict was also found to have a high influence on school management (55%) Goal conflicts had a relatively low influence on school management when compared to task and structural conflict(65%) while the work relationship conflict the lowest influence on school management (46%).The researcher recommends that all the necessary efforts should be made to manage workplace conflicts by enhancing communication amongst teachers, provision of adequate materials, as well' as the provision of a well-designed job design and job description and that teachers also be taught conflict resolution mechanisms

**KEYWORDS:** Conflict, Human resource, Management, Goal

## Background of the Study

The theme of conflict in workplace has different and divergent meaning, either positive or negative depending on the context to which it is observed. As has been observed by Putnam, (1995) conflict is not a sign of “crisis” within an organization, or break down of order, or dysfunctional order but rather an inevitable nature of organizational survival. According to (Rahim, 2011) it is in order to say that organizational conflict is a positive indicator or pointer of a functional and effective order in the organization, indeed absence of conflict may “smell” as a sign of dysfunction or ‘simmering conflict’. Conflict happens because of several reasons, without any order, the key cause is claim or struggle over control of resources, power and status, beliefs and other preferences and desires, tasks (Abdeen, Qasrawi, Nabil, and Shaheen, 2008). In this context therefore one may deduce that conflict when managed positively is essential and can predict productivity both within and outside precinct of the organization in that when solutions are found after conflict it is always at higher order than before the conflict arose which has been described by Skinner (2009) as “order after disorder, is order at higher order”. This aptly implies that as long as conflict results in searching for a solution to problems facing the society or the ecosystem and hence leads to effective attainment of organization mission, goals, vision and objective then it should be encouraged because conflict *per se* is neither a “bad thing” nor, indeed, a “good thing” - it is neutral (Blattman, and Annan, 2010). For many years across the world schools has been merely taken as a “collection of class-rooms, learners and tutors”, with school principals been seen as “transmitters of school orders and rules”, but in 21<sup>st</sup> century school principals are seen as “leaders, agent and facilitators of change (Okumbe, 2010). These is coupled with the shift of modern view of goals of education with schools becoming more autonomous, more responsive to their environment and stakeholders who includes the learners, teachers, communities, sponsors and government both at local and global level (Okumbe, 2010). This means the administrative function of school principal is now more than ever very essential and critical for smooth operation of the schools. Administrative role of head teachers or principals involve running day to day affair of school as the chief executive, financial management and supervision, school ambassador who create harmonious environment between all stakeholders involved in running schools, guiding and counseling and motivating teachers, offering leadership in school, ensuring instructional quality while ensuring school safety among others. Because of these myriad issues involved in schools administration conflict and conflict management in school is part of the norm Nyatuka (2002). School principals faces daily challenges including financial problem, school climate, school facilities, school order and discipline, teachers motivation, leadership challenges, According to (Griffin, 1996), conflict arise in context of schools because it involve various stakeholders who have interest and are after all human and come from different background and understanding of issues is different. According to Nyatuka (2002), school principals need to have well equipped conflict resolution knowledge if there are to survive in the running of public schools for effective and efficient while teachers should also assist in conflict resolution and should know the strategies for solving conflicts rather than escalating them.

## Problem Statement

The recent upsurge of unrests in schools together with strikes by teachers has puts focus on the capability of schools principals in conflict management in regards to schools management, this is because the principals seat at the pivot table where different stakeholders expect them to run schools on their behave, the government through Ministry of Education confers the mandate and power to school principals over the management of schools, the parents expectation are that their children are in the custody of the school authority at all time, while the teachers have their expectations in terms of career development and attainment. The sponsors and board have their focus on ensuring that the

school optimize its resources for the betterment of the school. Therefore school principals' attitudes and knowledge and style of leadership will determine the survival of the school. The purpose of the paper is to establish causes, manifestation and implication of schools conflict in school management.

### **Empirical Review**

As has been observed conflict cannot be classified as either "bad stuff" or "good stuff" since it all about the perceptions of those who are in the conflict, and indeed how conflict is perceived, defined, elaborated and handled is the premier factor when analysis the conflict matter. According to Champoux (2008) organizational conflict manifest either as inter-organizational conflict, more than one organizations involved or intra-organizational which occurs within the institution or organization. In the context of organizational conflict in schools the factors that premeditate such conflict can either be structural which relate to school culture and climate or the personal conflicts which relate to the way people relate and their differences (Blattman and Annan, 2010). However Rahim (2009) classify organizational conflict as either dyadic conflict which involves persons or groups or mythic which on the other hand involves class or segment of people. According to (Bentley,1996). in most organizations conflicts are caused by structural factors which include fight over status, work boundaries, resources, conflict of interest, and goals conflicts where by organizational goals may differ with individual personal goals of a worker. Specialization conflict occurs in situation where by a staff may have either more or less skills than the peers or workmates, a teacher may feel misused if at all he or she find has either too much skills of certain nature or no skills, in which case according to Auerbach and Dolan (2009) school principals should Endeavour to create synergy in the school where by the school should have common goal and all member should feel part of the bigger picture. Another structural conflict factor is where teachers are obligated to share resources for example teaching and learning materials, space and class rooms and because of scarcity of the resources conflict may arise. Another structural conflict factor is goal differences whereby according to Champoux (2009) members of the same group, read school, may have different and incompatible goals, teachers and principals may have different goals

### **Theoretical Framework**

The paper is grounded on two theories the social cognitive theory whose proponents was Albert, Bandura and Walter (1963) together with Skinner's instrumental theory (1953). The social cognitive theory postulates that "human behaviour is extensively motivated and regulated by self influences" (Bandura 2004, P248). This theory has been the front runner in foundation of many human behaviour theories and scholarly work in that it gives an insight into understanding and predicting human behaviours. The theory similarly give an understanding of foundations of human behaviour which an interaction of personal factors, the behaviours themselves and the environment where the person exist (Bandura and Walter, 2004). Bandura would later argue that learning in social setup is conducted through imitation which involves learning through cognitive process, which bring in the issues of conflict in workplaces, the behaviour of workers will be influences by the environment through which they interact in day to day basis in such a manner that, the outcome of conflict zone can already be predicted. Albert Bandura suggests existence of four distinct components stages of behaviour process which includes imitation, retention, reproduction and adoption. The connection between the social cognitive theory and influence of schools conflicts on school management can be found in that conflict is a behaviour that is learned through imitation, retention, reproduction and adoption since conflict happens as a results of daily interaction at work place and therefore the organization culture and its leadership can determine how conflicts are handled in the work place.

## **METHOD**

The choice of the researcher research design was descriptive design with a mixed methodology because the researcher needed to get data using both qualitative open ended questions and the closed question for the quantitative data, the most important reason for the choice of the method is for triangulation of the data in order to maximise on the benefit of qualitative and quantitative data analyses methods, descriptive research is according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2004) very ideal in a situation where by the research seek to obtain the phenomena of the study directly from the site of the study, in this case the researcher wanted to analyse how school conflicts affect school management

## **TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLE FRAME**

The researcher undertook to fill this gap by seeking the views of the teachers, head teachers and the various principals who take continuous education during holidays, currently undertaking Masters in school of education Mount Kenya, University located in the main campus at Thika. During the time of the research, there were 220 students in school of education and administration students at Mount Kenya University on August holiday who were 220 in number from all over the country.

## **INSTRUMENTATION**

researcher needed to get data using both qualitative open ended questions and the closed question for the quantitative data, the most important reason for the choice of the method is for triangulation of the data in order to maximise on the benefit of qualitative and quantitative data analyses methods, Orodho (2004) advocate the use of questionnaires in the situation where by the mass collection of data is needed, in a timely and cost effective manner.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data that was collected was analysed using Statistical software for social sciences version 20.0 because it is versatile to handle advanced statistical techniques like descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics used was frequency to establish various parameters sought by the research. Inferential statistics used was regression which was necessary in order to understand the relationships between the dependent and independent variables which was school conflict and school management. The open ended questions provided opportunity for the researcher to gather more qualitative comments to beef up the closed up questions. The researcher picked the main emerging themes from the comments of the respondents and summarised them into key areas.

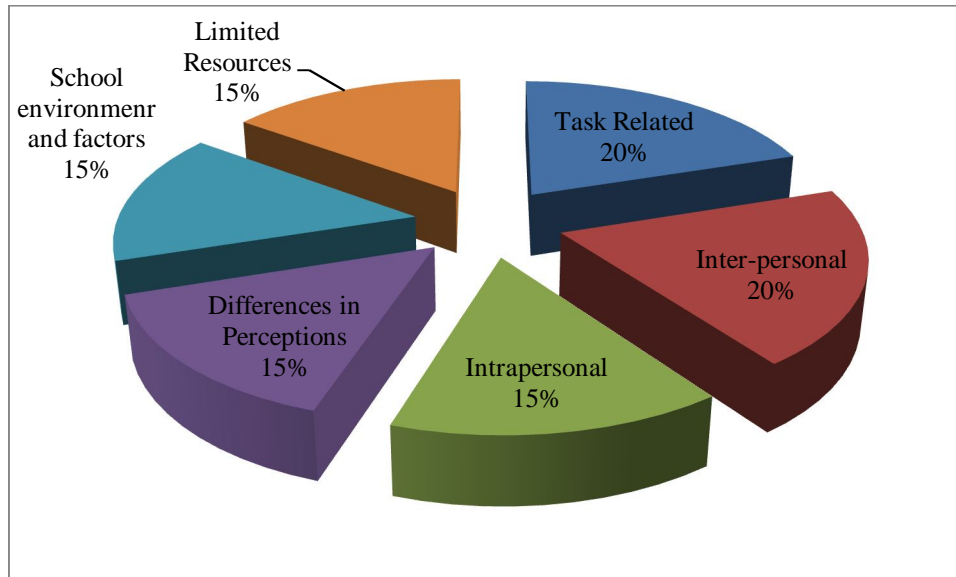
## **FINDINGS**

### **DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND**

The basic background information about the respondents was sought which included their gender, age, level of experience and education which is a common practice in research in order to understand the cohort used in the study, Such information helps to qualify the information sought, whether the source of the information could be trusted, were head teachers and teachers able to provide concrete information, were the qualified, were they experienced enough. Generally from the data analysed most members of cohort were male accounting to 80.0%, most of the participants

were of the age bracket of 31-40 years and the least of the age bracket of 51-and above, most of cohort had an experience of either teaching or in administration of above 16 years with the least with experience of less than 5 years. In terms of education most of the cohort was above Bachelor with least with education of Diplomas. From the foregoing one could clearly establish that the cohort used in this study had enough experience, adequate education background and in the mature age of having acquired enough exposure in the work environment.

**Common types of conflict in Teachers HRM departments**



The research established that according to teachers there are various common types of conflict which are as follows , main conflicts are structural in nature which are associated with limited resources, task and interdependency, differentiation of work and the personal conflict are common according to teachers and they are as follows communication conflicts, interpersonal, individual differences.

**Sources of conflict in school administration**

	Frequency	Percent
Financial problems experienced by principals	12	20.0
Strict application of rules and regulations.	18	30.0
Change in policy such as a hike in school fees	6	10.0
High handedness- Leadership styles	6	10.0
Inadequate facilities and amenities for students.	12	20.0
Non involvement of students in executing policies	6	10.0
Total	60	100.0

From school administration perspective the most common sources of conflicts are financial problems experienced by principals, Strict application of rules and regulations, Change in policy such as a hike in school fees, High handedness- Leadership styles, Inadequate facilities and amenities for student as well as Non involvement of students in executing policies.

#### **Frequency of *administrative* Conflicts in schools**

	Frequency	Percent
Very Low	10	16.6
Low	10	16.7
Average	30	50.0
High	6	10.0
Very High	4	6.7
Total	60	100.0

The research sought from the participants on frequents conflicts in schools functions are in various schools represented by respondents where most (67%) described frequency as either average, high or very high , the rest either described frequency as very low or very low as well as indicated by 23% of various teachers, head teachers and principals who participated in the study.

#### **Manifestation of administrative conflicts in various schools**

The finding from the data are summary of open ended question asking the teachers and principals who participated in the study to cite instances that they have encountered school management related conflict, the first comment was from a teacher who indicated that situation occurs where there insufficient resources and they find themselves competing either for the resources or for the attention of the school management so that they may get a favour, mentioning that this conflict is very common, another principal indicated that when there is a situation whereby the school is relying on a certain skill for example first aid, computer soft skills of one single teacher or any other skills the conflict arise because someone feel over utilized, while other conflict arise in a situation whereby department must rely on one other and are not working inter-dependently , leadership style of the head teachers is another major cause of conflict as mentioned by teachers with most indicating that dictatorial or laissez fare where school authority adopt lenient don't care, too much freedom being cited as a center of conflict, many teachers also felt that when privileges are given to one teacher in isolation of others, these causes conflict in a big manner in schools. Lack of clear roles and boundaries in allocation of duties was also cited as another sources of conflict where it manifest itself in teachers fighting over tasks or withholding responsibilities, Generational gaps conflict manifest itself in school in form of either resistance, or undermining the other and in some cases sabotage, long serving teacher may find themselves unable to cope with fresh graduate because of different mindsets, different skills, different methodology of instructional delivery, for those teachers or principals enable to separate personal issues with work related issues, conflict manifest itself in various manner, including moods changes, the personality differences and cultural; differences also manifest itself in most schools

### Implication of conflict in school in relationship to HRM Management

	Frequency	Percent
Conflict when unresolved leads to loss of teachers productivity	7	12.5
Conflict leads to poor relationships amongst teachers, pupils and management	7	12.5
Conflict causes response to more conflict	12	20.0
Conflicts can causes principals or head teachers turnovers, leading to leadership disruption which interfere with students academic performance	12	20.0
Conflict can leads to workplace violence and bullying	6	10.0
Conflict can leads to employees/teachers loss and turnover	6	10.0
Conflict causes mental health problems and stress disorder	6	10.0
Total	60	100.0

From foregoing it can be seen that existence of conflicts may be harmful to teachers' morale and job satisfaction which may affect school management and performance. Conflict when unresolved leads to loss of teachers productivity, Conflict leads to poor relationships amongst teachers, pupils and management, Conflict causes response to more conflict, Conflicts can causes principals or head teachers turnovers, leading to leadership disruption which interfere with students academic performance, Conflict can leads to workplace violence and bullying, Conflict can leads to employees/teachers loss and turnover and Conflict causes mental health problems and stress disorder.

### Positive side of conflict in workplace by teachers

Conflict in workplace may help to raise and address problems currently facing staffs	7	12.5
Conflict help teachers to be more participatory, by making them to be real and revealing hidden issues	7	12.5
Conflict helps in addressing the most pertinent issues among many issues in the school	12	20.0
Conflicts can causes principals or teachers to recognize and benefits from their differences	12	20.0
Total	60	100.0

The paper established that there are several positive side of conflict in the school setting as emphasized by teachers which are as follows Conflict in workplace may help to raise and address problems currently facing staffs, Conflict help teachers to be more participatory, by making them to be real and revealing hidden issues, Conflict helps in addressing the most pertinent issues among

many issues in the school and Conflicts can causes principals or teachers to recognize and benefits from their differences

### **Influence of conflicts on the school management**

Conflict	Yes	No
task conflicts had a major influence on the efficient school management	66.0	34.0
The structural conflict was also found to have a high influence on successful school management	55.0	45.0
Goal conflicts had a relatively low influence on successful school management when compared to task and structural conflict	65.0	35.0
work relationship conflict the lowest influence on the school management	46.0	64.0
Total		100.0

Among the key findings established in the study were that task conflicts had a major influence on the efficient school management (66%).The structural conflict was also found to have a high influence on successful school management (55%) Goal conflicts had a relatively low influence on successful school management when compared to task and structural conflict(65%) while the work relationship conflict the lowest influence on the school management (46%).

### **Extent to which conflict influence school administration**

Inferential statistical technique referred to as Pearson correlation was used to guide the analysis of the hypothetical question of whether the school conflicts can infer the success or failure of schools administration, with that in mind frequency and number of conflict was inferred to the level of success or failure in school management measured in a likert scale of highest level 5 and lowest level 1. Pearson correlations according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2004) is an excellent statistical procedure to establish such a relationship, in order to interpret the inference a coefficient of determination  $r$  and  $p$  value is used to test the relationship .All the variables had a significant large effect:  $r > 0.05$ ) Pearson correlations, the results show that there is a reverse relationship between conflict witnessed in school and successful organizational management whereby as conflict of various form increased the perception of manager on ability to manage the school decreases by 89.9%.

		Frequency of Conflict in schools(Number of incidence)
School Management(Rating)	Pearson Correlation	-.800**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	000
	N	60



## Conclusion

From the findings the study found there are school management conflict in schools are common and mostly they are between school principals and teachers more than school principals and students or students and teachers , though sometimes is not as “ loud” as the conflict between school management and students which often precipitate into strikes and arson,, sometimes when such conflicts occur it is normally concealed and may not be manifested, teachers were found to express conflict or the conflict in that case will manifest itself in terms of slow work, sabotage, demotivation, silence and rarely aggression , therefore it was noted that as long as people work together there will definitely be conflict and therefore measures can be taken to reduce the conflict.

## Recommendations

The school management need to build capacity in the schools to absorb when conflict arises since as observed conflicts are inevitable. The school leadership need to be transformative and adaptive such that when need arises they are able to adjust to the current state and so that each conflict is managed on it own depending on it nature. There is a need to create a conducive environment that nurture team work in the school climate so that there is ownership of the vision and mission of the entire school to reduce internal conflicts and goal related conflict. Nurturing leadership skills in the who school community can help in safeguarding the school in it entirety because many conflict arise where different level of management are fighting and do not share the same vision.

## REFEREES

Abdeen, Z., Qasrawi, R., Nabil, S., and Shaheen, M., (2008). Psychological reactions to Israeli occupation: Findings from the national study of school-based screening in Palestine. *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, 32, 290-297: Working Paper Series no.215

Albert, Bandura. 1977. Social learning theory. ... Learn more about these *citation* styles: APA (6th ed.) | Chicago

Angrist, J. and V. Lavy. (1999). Using Maimonides' Rule to Estimate the Effect of Class Size on Scholastic Achievement. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 114: 533–575)

Baron, R. A. (1991). Positive effects of conflict: A cognitive perspective. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 2, 25-36.

Bentley, M. (1996). Conflict Resolution in Schools: Quicker peace and service. Cambridge, U.S.A: Cambridge University Press, p.4

Blattman, C. and Annan, J. (2010).The consequences of child soldiering. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, vol. 92(4): 882–898

Blattman, C. and Miguel.E., (2010). Civil war. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 48(1): 3–57.

- Buvinic, M., Das Gupta, M. and Shemyakina, O., (2013). Armed Conflict, Gender and Schooling. *World Bank Economic Review*, forthcoming
- Champoux, J. E. (2006). Organizational behaviour: integrating individuals, groups and organizations New Delhi: Radha Publications .
- Dana, K., & Griffin, R. W. (1999). Health and well-being in the workplace: A review and synthesis of the literature. *Journal of Management*, 25, 357 – 384
- Griffin,G.(1996).School Mastery. Nairobi : Lectern Publishers Limited :Nairobi.
- Laue, J. H. (1990). The emergence and institutionalization of third-party roles in conflict, in John, B and Frank, D (eds.). *Conflict: readings in management and resolution*, USA: Macmillan.
- Mugenda, O. & Mugenda, A. (2003).*Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*; Act Press: Nairobi
- Nyatuka, B.(2002,July1).Challenges that Face School Administrators. Nairobi: The Daily Nation p21.
- Okumbe,J.A.(2010).Educational Management: theory and practice. Nairobi: Nairobi University Press.
- Orodho J.A., (2004) Techniques of Writing Research Proposals and Reports in Education, Masda
- Rahim, M. A., (2001). Managing conflict in organizations (3rd Ed.); Westport, CT: Quorum Books
- Rahim, S. (2003). Impact of Israeli measures on Palestinian child labour and schooling; ERF Working Paper Series no.215
- Rahim, M.A., Magner, N.R., Shapiro, D.L (2000) Do justice perceptions influence styles of handling conflict with supervisors. What justice perceptions precisely? *The International Journal of Conflict Management*, 11(1), 9-31.
- Skinner, B. F. (n.d.) A brief survey of operant behaviour; Retrieved January 26, 2010, from The B.F. Skinner Foundation Website:  
<http://www.bfskinner.org/BFSkinner/SurveyOperantBehavior.html>
- Wright, Q., (1990). The nature of conflict“, in John B and Frank D (eds). *Conflict: readings in management and resolution*, Macmillan: USA.