

**SCHOOL CONFLICT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE  
MANAGEMENT: 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**

Human resource management are the critical in success in any organization and especially public institutions like schools where principal ought be effective in his or her role as a human resource managers to assist in monitoring and evaluation and appraisal of teachers, with other role such as provision of safe and conducive working environments, development of the human resources through staff motivation, and teacher development through courses and training. Conflict in public secondary schools takes different dimensions. The purpose of the current research paper is to establish school conflict and it implication on school management. The factors wider investigation was work relationship conflicts, task conflicts, structural conflicts and the goal conflicts and how they influence the performance of teachers. A review of literature was conducted so as to find out what other researchers had found out on studies related to the topic.

The researcher filled the gap by seeking the views of teachers , head teacher and principals in consisted of ongoing practicing teachers undertaking Masters in education and administration students at Mount Kenya University on August holiday who were 220 in number from all over the country. Conflict leads to low morale to teachers as well as leading to loss of career growth opportunities with at time loss of jobs, as well as that conflict waste time for students to engage in meaningful activities of learning in school and therefore it affect performance both at individual and school level since it involves interfering with quality of the learning environment, increasing absenteeism of students and pupils and teachers, leadership crisis and morale of teachers, some conflict both at physical, social, psychological and emotional level

**KEYWORDS: Manifestation, causes, conflict, school management**

**INTRODUCTION**

Of many definition of conflict by different scholars in the field of organization management, the among the most precise description and definition is state of expressing differences of opinions, perceptions hostility, misunderstanding, anarchy, chaos (Wright,1990), depending on the gravitas of the conflict and whether it involves personal arguments, institutional ,structural, struggle, disruptions, or even physical fighting and wars (Gebretensay and Tesfay, 2002). Conflict is a process in any organization that occurs in the process of social interaction, where individual or groups' goals and objectives are in collision and where there is different interest groups which are in competition (Ivancevich & Matteson, 2002). Conflict therefore has no basis of being described as either on realm of good, bad or neutral as Brenda(2009) explains, rather it is the way that conflict

is perceived by the protagonist, the way the conflict boundary is defined and handled that has the potential for generating either positive or negative effects. According to Dana & Griffin (1999), in the context of what happens at the work place conflicts are inevitable and are categorised depending on the source of the conflict itself, in which case there are those conflict that emanate from power and authority, resources, personal goals, ethics, interpersonal differences consisting of misunderstandings, difference of opinion and poor communication between two persons and hence conflict by itself can be harmful to employee satisfaction and job performance if it becomes excessive and unmanageable and unpredictable. Best practices in human resource management in any institution are the critical for success of any individual organization and in this relation school principal ought be effective in his or her role as a human resource managers to assist in monitoring and evaluation and appraisal of teachers, with other role such as provision of safe and conducive working environments, development of the human resources through staff motivation, and teacher development through courses and training. The paper examine school conflicts and it implication on human resource management of schools. According to Jehn and Bendersky, (2003), conflict management is an element of human resource management and hence head teacher or principal of a school ought to be equipped with various techniques of human resource conflict resolution practices. Therefore Conflict in the context of HRM management ranges from work issues of responsibility, power, authority, and ethics to interpersonal matters like misunderstandings, difference of opinion and poor communication between two persons which if left un-attended can be harmful to employees (teachers and other staff) job satisfaction and job productivity. This is because every activity in the school involves interaction of different stakeholders from teachers, students, parents, sponsors, board of management, government and school suppliers and if not solved can leads to such instances as loss of work productivity, risks of litigation, accidents and injuries, absenteeism, wasted time especially in schools which can further affect school performance, conflict can also cause health problem especially emotional and psychological effect (Bentley, 2009). Conflict therefore is that kind of disagreement that disrupts normal flow of work and leads to loss of time, productivity and morale depending on whether it is negative or positive conflict. Positive conflict is good for organization since it leads to creativity and productivity, however negative conflict leads to loss whether disruption of individual and organizational goals, this is especially so in situation where by people/ staff/workmate receive or perceive threat either physical, mental, emotional or loss of status and power, or in situation where people are perceived to be taking advantage of others in the work place (Hitt, Miller, Chet, 2006).

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

From the foregoing best practices in human resource management are the critical in success in any organization and especially public institutions like schools where principal ought be effective in his or her role as a human resource managers to assist in monitoring and evaluation and appraisal of teachers, with other role such as provision of safe and conducive working environments, development of the human resources through staff motivation, and teacher development through courses and training. Conflict in public secondary schools takes different dimensions it becomes common that conflict between teachers and the school principal occur frequently at any time in the school. In institutions, conflict occurs between various individuals because of their frequent interaction with each other. Conflict in school affect effective practices in human resource management have been employed in schools for quality education remains questionable. According to Bentley, (2009) the most critical components of conflict is the perception of the conflict rather than the objective aspect of the conflict and these determine how the conflict is resolved, therefore the intention of conflict may be different from the perception of the conflict, for instance how we

pass a message when communicating determine how the respondent react to the message and a good manager or head of a school should encourage clarity and consistency of work procedures, accountability and being adaptive to different situation as conflict arises.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Interdependent conflict on the other hand occurs in a situation where staffs are depending on each other to complete a task which may create a potential clash if the focus is not the same. Another conflict zone is leadership style and jurisdiction ambiguities which can occur when lines of responsibilities are not clear, un-predictable and uncertain. According to Champoux, (2006), role and expectations is another potential cause of conflict since it refers to what is expected of a employees within the organization. Concerning personal factors that causes organizational conflict, Baron, (1991), noted that there includes and based on work differences in employees ability and skills, diversity and background, communication problems and perception of what constitute conflict, Take example of conflict based on skills and abilities a long- teaching teachers being allocated a task with a newly graduated teacher will have a conflict on the other hand according to (Rahim, 2003), personality conflict occurs because of differences of personality, introvert, extrovert, nosy, hardworking, sensitive, critical people etc, similarly diversity conflict are common in schools because of differences in age, cultural background, values, the other common type of personal conflict are the deliberate personal issues and poor communication which according to (Rahim, 2003), they account to majority of the causes of the conflict in organizations like schools

### **METHOD**

The researcher sought to use descriptive research design, because according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2004) a research design is the approach that the research will undertake in the cause of the whole research which start from the way data is collected, tools used, procedures for sampling and analysis. In the same vein the researcher used mixed methodology as a choice of data collection strategy which influenced the types of tools used. The mixed methodology means that two types of tools were used, the qualitative tools was in form of the closed ended questionnaires while the quantitative tool was in form of the open ended commentary from the questionnaires

### **TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLE FRAME**

Target population in the current study consisted of ongoing practicing teachers undertaking Masters in education and administration students at Mount Kenya University on August holiday who were 220 in number from all over the country. According to Kothari (2004) a research need to define his or her unit of study in order to create awareness of the scope, limitation and delimitation of the study. The population consisted of primary and secondary teachers, head teachers and principals who formed the sampling frame for the study.

## **INSTRUMENTATION**

The current research utilised a well structured questionnaires with both qualitative and quantitative sections. The closed ended sections of the questionnaire represented the quantitative data while the open ended section represented the qualitative data. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts, the first part was meant to collect data about the bio-data of the respondents which was in for questions, the gender, age, experience and education level, the second part of the questionnaire consisted of the various research questions.

## **DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE**

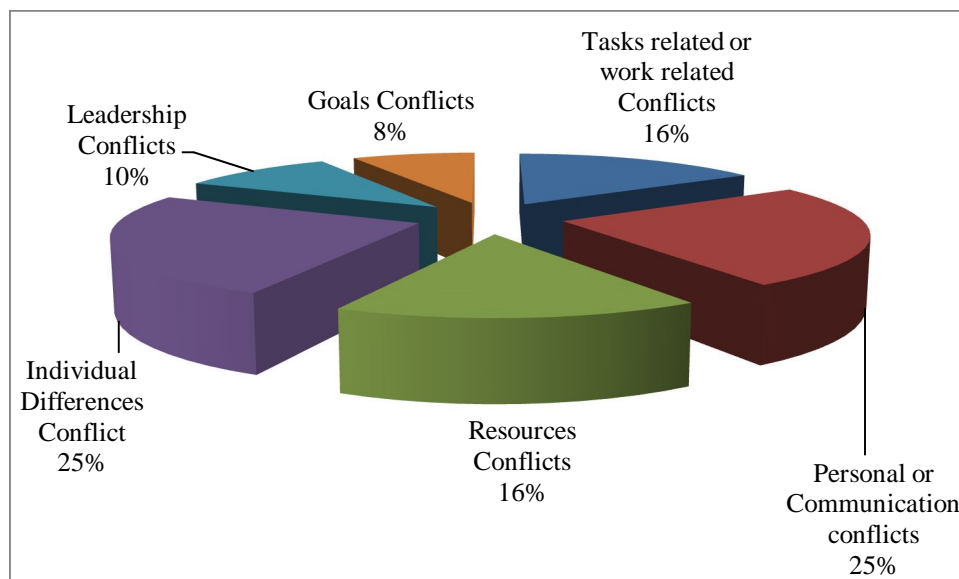
The researcher had utilised a well structured questionnaires with both qualitative and quantitative sections. The closed ended sections of the questionnaire represented the quantitative data while the open ended section represented the qualitative data. To begin with the researcher was impressed with the quantity and quality of the data. Initial analysis started with identification of the main emerging themes from the qualitative comments which was later followed by analysis of closed ended data, descriptive techniques was used to analyse the first set of the data with frequency table and chart being used to present the findings, Pearson correlation was used to indicate the main purpose of the paper, which was to show the relationship between school conflicts and HRM Functions of the school.

## **FINDINGS**

### **DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND**

The study focused on wide categories of teachers, head teachers and principals of various schools of the students at Mount Kenya University, the target population was 220 which after sampling was reduced to 60.0 cohorts. The cohort finally consisted of more male than female as accounted by 60.0% of the respondents as opposed to 40.0%. The majority of cohort were of the age bracket of 31-40 years with the least being above 50 years, the minimum education of the cohort was Diploma education while most were above Bachelor degree, most of the sampled teachers had enough experience in either teaching or being in administration with the least being less than 5 years and most being over 21 years experience. From the foregoing the research was impressed with the selected cohort and presented them to undertake the further analysis

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



The research established in any organization like schools, especially in Human resource department or work related functions the most common conflict are personal conflicts which included individual defences as shown in figure accounting to 25.0% and communication conflicts as opposed to task related or structural conflicts as shown by 16.0% for task related or work related conflicts, and resources conflicts which account to 10.0% of the respondents

**Sources of conflict in Human Resource management**

	Frequency	Percent
Leadership style of school head can be a reasonable predictors of conflicts	10	20.0
A hostile working environment which is characterised by rivalry and competition causes goals conflict	2	15.0
Limited or skewed allocation of duties and resources yields the biggest causes of conflict in work environment	2	15.0
Blame game culture and lack of ethics breeds conflicts	2	18.0
Corruption leads to conflicts	2	20.0
Constraint and lack of participatory environment	2	10.0
Total	60	100.0

The most common sources of conflicts in schools working environment of late were mentioned as follows, Leadership style of school head can be a reasonable predictors of conflicts , A hostile working environment which is characterised by rivalry and competition causes goals conflict,

Limited or skewed allocation of duties and resources yields the biggest causes of conflict in work environment, Blame game culture and lack of ethics breeds conflicts, Corruption leads to conflicts and Constraint and lack of participatory environment

### Frequency of Conflicts in schools HRM

	Frequency	Percent
Very Low	4	10.0
Low	10	10.0
Average	30	30.0
High	6	30.0
Very High	4	20.0
Total	60	100.0

The research from the cohort on their experience on the frequency of conflicts of various forms in the work environment with most indicating that (80.0%) there is above average conflicts in schools where they teach with 20.0% indicating that conflict are low in respective schools where they teach.

### Manifestation of conflict in HRM

	%
Go slow or withdrawing, or lack of initiative to various activities with in the schools	10
Verbal exchange of words which sometimes leads to emotional harm or psychological harm	12
causing disturbance for other students(physical)	12
Lack of motivation amongst teachers and other stakeholders	10
Destruction and through sabotage	8
Physical confrontation	12
Communication breakdown	12
Relationship breakdown	24
	100

From the cohort who included teachers, head teachers and principals who participated in the study some times conflicts will manifest in various ways in the school community go slow or withdrawing, or lack of initiative to various activities with in the schools, Verbal exchange of words which sometimes leads to emotional harm or psychological harm, causing disturbance for other students(physical), Lack of motivation amongst teachers and other stakeholders, Destruction and through sabotage, Physical confrontation, Communication breakdown and Relationship breakdown

**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

In context of work environment at schools 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

### Extent to which conflict influence HRM Functioning

The Pearson correlation was an inferential statistics procedure that was used to find out whether level of conflict in various schools that participated in the study have a relationship at all with either success of school management or failure in school management, the indicator for level of school management was a likert scale where by the respondent rated the level of various school in the way they are managed, the highest level was 5, which excellent where lowest was 1 which was very low, while the number of conflicts was indicators of conflicts in schools, through Pearson correlation a coefficient of determination,  $r$  and a significance of the effect is used to show degree of the association between dependent and independent variable of the study. 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 functioning of HRM activities in the school whereby as conflict of various form increased the standard of HRM management decreases by 79.9%.

		Frequency of Conflict in schools
School Management	Pearson Correlation	-.799**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	60

### Conclusion

Conflict leads to low morale to teachers as well as leading to loss of career growth opportunities with at some loss of jobs, as well as conflict waste time for students to engage in meaningful activities of learning in school and therefore it affect performance both at individual and school level since it involves interfering with quality of the learning environment, increasing absenteeism of students and pupils and teachers, leadership crisis and morale of teachers, some conflict both at physical, social, psychological and emotional level causes trauma and distress to students which have a long term implication to their health which has an overall impact in students or pupils achievement in school, it may also result in lack of confidence in the school administration ability Therefore Conflict in the context of HRM management ranges from work issues of responsibility, power, authority, and ethics to interpersonal matters like misunderstandings, difference of opinion and poor communication between two persons which if left un-attended can be harmful to employees (teachers and other staff) job satisfaction and job productivity. Successful management of workplace conflict is paramount to overall success of school community

### Recommendations

From the findings and conclusion of the study various observation were made which are the basis of the recommendations that the researcher gave. First of all having realized that conflicts in the context of schools working environments are inevitable and so the questions is not whether these conflict will exist but how they will be handled and so from HRM perspective schools need to undertake training for all stakeholders who include teachers, head teachers and board on one side but the students and parents on the other side of continuum. The school authority need to invest enough resources which is another major cause of conflicts in work environment, teaching and



learning resources need to be adequate to cater for all and sundry. Job design and job description need to be addressed to make sure that there is no conflicts in tasks, skewed allocation of tasks leads to massive conflict, not having well designed job structure is another major cause of conflicts, with these in mind there ought to be a lot of consideration on strengths and weaknesses of various staffs and allocate them duties in a manner that each person feels to have breathing space and there no conflict in task. Staff development is another important necessity in HRM departments since well motivated and focused staff does not conflict on goals and mission since each one feel to have obligation for the wider scope which is the school. Leadership that encourage and appreciate staff is important in the way to avoid conflict in work place, leadership in schools should be encouraged to be open to criticism and participatory in the way they approach the conflict management.

### REFEREES

- Baron, R. A. (1991). Positive effects of conflict: A cognitive perspective. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 2, 25-36.
- 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
- Champoux, J. E. (2006). *Organizational behavior: 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
- Gebretensay Tesfay (2002), A Study of factors that generate conflict between government secondary school teachers and educational managers in Addis Ababa Administrative Region, A Thesis presented to The School of Graduate Studies Addis Ababa University, p.3
- Hitt, M. A., Miller, C., Chet, C. A. (2006). *Organizational Behavior: A Strategic Approach*. USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc
- Ivancevich, J., Matteson M., (2002), *Organizational Behaviour and Management*, McGraw-Hill
- Jehn, K., & Bendersky, C. (2003). Intergroup conflict in organizations: A contingency perspective on the conflict – outcome relationship. In R. M. Kramer & B. M. Staw (Eds.), *Research in organizational behaviour* (Vol. 25, pp. 187 – 242.) New York: Elsevier JAI.
- Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Washira

- Mugenda, O. & Mugenda, A. (2003). *Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*; Act Press: Nairobi
- 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.
- Wright, Q. (1990). „The nature of conflict“, in John B and Frank D. (eds) *Conflict: readings in management and resolution*, Macmillan: USA