

**SCHOOL CONFLICTS AND IMPLICATIONS ON STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE:  
A CASE STUDY OF PRACTICING TEACHERS UNDERTAKING MASTERS IN  
EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION AT MOUNT KENYA UNIVERSITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the paper was to evaluate the influence of student's conflict on the academic performance. Target population is the aggregate of the study unit whom 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. The gathered data was analyzed using quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. Qualitative research tools were analyzed using descriptive techniques frequency tabulation as well as person correlation to establish the link between frequency of schools conflict and academic performance. The open ended qualitative comments were analyzed to establish the major emerging themes. Conflict in Kenya Public Schools is a common phenomena which is manifested in various manners such as indiscipline cases, disobedience, delinquent behaviours, time wastage , truancy, causing disturbance through verbal or physical confrontation which can sometimes precipitate into violence, indiscipline's cases sometimes is an indicators of underlying and simmering conflict, sabotage of schools norms like tasks, destroying the school properties, communication breakdown and relational breakdowns. If these conflicts are not managed and controlled it prevent students at personal level and school at large from attaining the purpose of education and will have negative impact on student academic performance. Conflict when unresolved leads to pupils and students absenteeism in class which affect academic performance , Conflict causes higher teachers absenteeism which affect performance of pupils or students, Conflict causes poor quality of education, Conflicts can causes principals or head teachers turnovers, leading to leadership disruption which interfere with students academic performance, Conflicts causes pupils or students retention and enrolment crisis affecting performance, Conflict at individual or school level causes destruction of schools properties, teaching and learning materials and Conflict causes school closure which interfere with learning calendars

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

**INTRODUCTION**

Conflict is considered as part of life and the one which cannot be avoided since conflict on its own does not indicate lack of cooperation or dysfunctional ecosystem and therefore according to (Putnam, 1994), schools as organization will have to find ways of dealing with conflicts as they arise since conflict has the positive and negative side depending on the way it is approached and resolved. According to Rahim (2011) Conflict in any organization arises because of several factors which include power and status, beliefs, attitudes, desires and preferences and the struggle over

resources. Conflict when addressed leads to productivity as it leads to formulation of creative synergy of ideas which can lead to conflict resolutions (Mary, Gary and Bryan, 2013).

Several research has been done on factors influencing academic performance both at global and local perspective yielding different results where by what is clear is that the predictors of academic performance in school varies depending on Countries, regions, school population and school types (Krueger and Lindahl, 2001).

Researchers have Studies on factors influencing academic performance has been done at different levels both internationally and regionally yielding different results. Predictors of schools dynamics affecting school performance differ among countries, regions, school types, school populations, and school sectors. A study by Smith, (2003), on factors influencing academic performance found that the most critical factors are school culture, discipline, learning facilities, proper guidance and family stress. Previously another study by Nwagwu, (2009) attributed student academic performance to such diverse factors as pupils gender difference, teacher's education and teaching style, curriculum diversity, class environment, socio economic factor and family education background. Similarly according to Kremer, (2003) who examined individual academic achievement rather than overall school achievement in elementary schools in Korea found that academic achievement can be influenced by several factors such as personal, household and school characteristics as well as local and national socioeconomic conditions. Other researchers namely Hannah and Simley (2009) point the academic performance to nature of physical infrastructure in schools. A study in Nigeria by Oghuvbu, (2010).laid the emphasizes on public spending in schools as the best predictor of academic performance, recommending the Government to spend more on education to boost quality and quantity of the outcomes. At local level one study by Onyara P.N. (2013) rooted poor performance in schools to quality of school management while Wanyama (2003) managed to confirm that there was a relationship between head teachers leadership styles and academic performance. In this paper the focus is conflict and its influence in students academic performance which is a very rare topic and none of the research at local level has been done, only few literature review exist providing robust evidence of the effect of conflicts on the quality and quantity of education which will be measured using different educational outcomes, namely school enrolment, school attendance and school attainment (UNESCO, 2011).

### **Problem Statement**

The Country witnessed unprecedented manifestation of conflicts in more than 150 public secondary schools across the Country during the Months of August 2016 where many learning institution were burnt down, properties of millions of shilling consisting of classrooms, libraries, and laboratory were lost in flames. To most people, the biggest implication of these conflicts observed in various schools was loss of teaching and learning infrastructure but on the other side of continuum was loss of time for learning for students since such conflicts caused closure of most schools, expulsion of students, absenteeism of teachers, change of leadership of schools amongst others, the net effect of these conflict is expected to continue being felt in the effect on performance of students either at individual or at school level. Several studies have been done establishing that learners' academic performance can be influenced by factors such as home environment factors and school characteristics as well as intervening variables such as government policies but few study has focused on influence of conflicts on students performance which is a very contemporary issues since conflict are now very common in public schools in Kenya. Literature review had provided adequate and robust evidence that conflict can interfere with both quality and quantity of education

as measured by educational outcomes such as students' performance, school enrolment rate, school attendances and retention of education

### **Purpose**

Evaluating the influence of School Conflict and Implication for Student Performance

### **Conflict and academic performance**

Academic performance or achievement is an abstract idea, and it can only be measured or assessed using different methods where in most cases learners are subjected to continuous assessment or grading, but in some cases student's performance can be measured using other parameters such sports, talents e.t.c. There growing shift world wide on what constitute students performance in schools and what is the best parameter to use to measure the same. As Rubin, Bukowski & Parker, (2009), put it, the idea of academic performance as the most important yardstick to measure student performance become famous because it has been promoted by many scholars and researchers, otherwise other methods are as well important. It is important to acknowledge that the world is shifting attention of education as holistic learning and experience Baron, (1991). Learning outcomes which includes both cognitive and physical are critical for future human capital mobility according to study by

Several studies has grouped causes of conflicts depending on the source of the conflict into the following; relational conflict, where conflict stems from interpersonal incompatibilities, secondly task conflict which is related to disagreements in viewpoint and opinions about a certain particular task and process conflict which refers to conflict over the group's approach to task and the methodology chosen to address the task. The propensity or gravity of conflict according to Amason, (1996) depend on type of conflict, whereby while relationship and process conflict are most harmful if not addressed amicably, they are the best when addressed since they give room for growth of the individuals involved in the conflict, in the same vein task conflict are normally dismal in the propensity according to (Amason and Sapienza, 1997), since they are found to be beneficial since it encourages diversity of opinions, although care should be taken so it does not develop into process or relationship conflict. The author similarly was able to differentiate another form of conflict which is affective and cognitive conflict, where cognitive conflict is task-oriented and arises from differences in perspective or judgment, and affective conflict is emotional and difficult, personal and arises from personal differences and disputes.

### **Method**

Research method is normally the detailing of the procedures which were used to collect data including how the data was collected, who was target, how they were selected and the methodology for analysis. The research choice of methodology was descriptive research design in that as indicated by Mugenda and Mugenda (2004) the choice of such a method is based on the phenomenal of the study. The descriptive method is ideal for a situation where by one want to gather information about a phenomena at it point of happening, and not to be manipulated in anyway or experimented. The purpose of the current study was to establish effect of conflict on students' performance

### **Target population and sample frame**

Target population is the aggregate of the study unit whom 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. The population consisted of primary and secondary teachers, head teachers and principals who formed the sampling frame for the study.

### **Instrumentation**

The key data collection tools was questionnaire, which contained two section, the first section being preliminaries which is used to collect the bio-data of the respondents while the other section contained the research questioned organized in a systematic manner. The questionnaire contained both open ended and closed questions. The choice of questionnaire as research main tools for data collection is based on evidence from literature review where by scholars such as Creswel, (2011). indicates that questionnaire are reliable and noble tools to gather data quickly and effectively. While others such as Kothari (2004) and Orodho (2003) equate questionnaires as free from chances of bias and have high level of integrity since reliability and validity of the tools can be tested beforehand with great ease.

### **Data analysis technique**

Data analysis involved both qualitative research techniques and their counterpart the quantitative bearing in mind that the questionnaire utilized contained closed and open ended questions. Using SPSS (Statistical package for social scientist) the quantitative closed data were subjected to descriptive analysis to establish the frequency of the respondents on various research questions while finally Pearson correlation was used to find out whether the school conflicts has an effect on students academic performance. The findings from quantitative analysis were all presented using frequency tables and charts. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis where the research read through the comments and identified the main themes which were later presented.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Demographic background**

Respondents constituted of primary and secondary teachers, head teachers and principals. The primary demographic background of the respondents was sought by the research in order to confirm that the targeted respondents were the right source of information which was being sought. This is based by argument by Kothari (2004) that where views of respondents may differ based on their demographic and social background it is important to establish such bio information. By a slight margin, male teachers, principals and head teachers dominated the group where male were 60.0% while females respondents accounted for 40.0% of the respondents, most respondents, read principals, head teachers and teachers belonged to the age bracket of 31-40 years while least on either the bracket of above 51 years or below 18-30 Regarding to the job experience most respondents had experience of above 16 years old and the least below 5 years . Most respondents were of above university education while least possessed either certificate or diploma in education. From the foregoing the researcher was comfortable to use the target group because there were heterogenous, had enough education, experience and expertise and could be relied to provide pertinent information on the research question related with schools conflict and implication on academic performance

### Research question

The study sought to assess the causes of conflicts in schools and found that 66% of the respondents believes that substance abuse is the leading causes of conflict between students and school management, 23.0% indicated inter-personal conflict either between students or teachers, poor skills in handling students accounted by 13.0%, school leadership problem was mentioned by 20.0% of students, psychological, social and socio-economic factors and home environment create class system in school fuelling conflict, entitlement and resource conflict between different level in the school for example form 1,, form 2,, form 3,, form4 fight over control, ideological and generational gaps between students from different background causes conflict among themselves as indicated by 10.0% of the population.

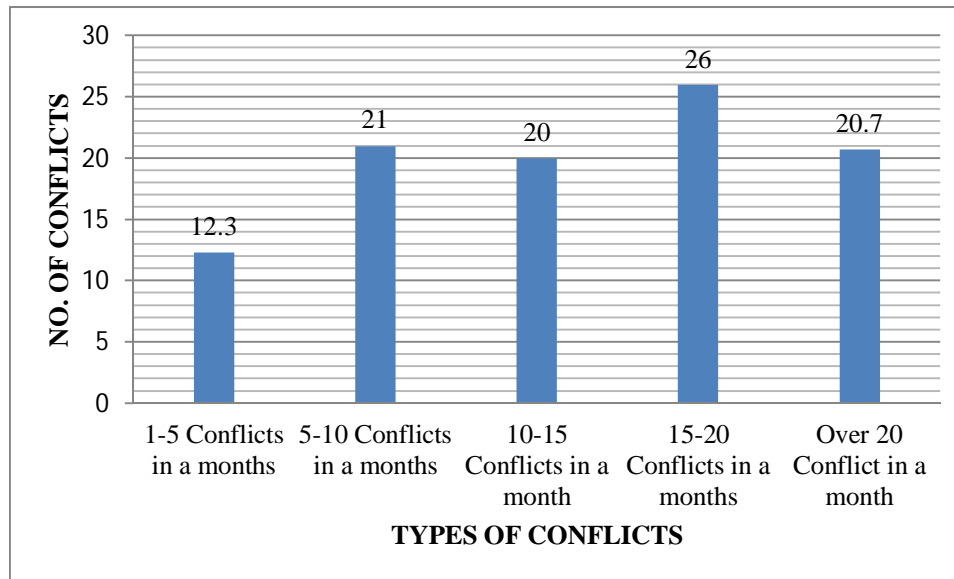
**Table 1: Sources of conflict between students and schools**

	Frequency	Percent
Substance abuse	12	20.0
Discipline crisis	12	20.0
Leadership approach in the school	12	20.0
Relational ship between students and among other stakeholders	12	20.0
Ideological problem from influence of home environment and social-economic backgrounds of students	12	20.0
Total	60	100.0

**Table 2: Frequency of Conflicts in schools**

	Frequency	Percent
Very Low	3	5.0
Low	6	10.0
Average	18	30.0
High	6	20.0
Very High	9	15.0
Total	6	10.0
Did not respond	6	10.0
	60	100.0

The research sought from the participants on frequents conflicts 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.

**Fig 1: Number of conflict in a month witnessed in various schools**

The study established that there are many incidences of conflicts of various forms witnessed in various schools with most respondents indicating as many as 15-20 conflicts in a single months as expressed by 26.0% of teachers, head teachers and principals while least indicating that in their schools there are 1-5 conflicts of one form or another witnessed in schools within a month. It is imperative to note that no respondent indicated that there is no incidence of conflict in their school.

**Table 3: Manifestation of conflict in schools by students**

	%
Truancy and failure to participate in class work	10
Verbal Confrontation; Emotional	12
Physical confrontation	12
Indiscipline	10
sabotage of school norms	8
destroying the school properties, buildings, facilities	12
Communication breakdown	12
Relationship breakdown	24
	60

From teachers, head teachers and principals who participated in the study conflict indicators are mostly behavioural, which includes lack of participating in classrooms programs, causing disturbance either verbal or physical, indiscipline's cases sometimes is an indicators of underlying and simmering conflict, sabotage of schools norms like tasks, destroying the school properties, communication breakdown and relational breakdown.

**Table 4: Implication of conflict in school in relationship to students' academic performance.**

	Frequency	Percent
Conflict when unresolved leads to pupils and students absenteeism in class which affect academic performance	7	12.5
Conflict causes higher teachers absenteeism which affect performance of pupils or students	7	12.5
Conflict causes poor quality of education	12	20.0
Conflicts can causes principals or head teachers turnovers, leading to leadership disruption which interfere with students academic performance	12	20.0
Conflicts causes pupils or students retention and enrolment crisis affecting performance	6	10.0
Conflict at individual or school level causes destruction of schools properties, teaching and learning materials	6	10.0
Conflict causes school closure which interfere with learning calendars	6	10.0
Total	60	100.0

The research also sought to establish from respondents about likely implication of conflicts to students academic performance where most indicated as follow, Conflict when unresolved leads to pupils and students absenteeism in class which affect academic performance , Conflict causes higher teachers absenteeism which affect performance of pupils or students, Conflict causes poor quality of education, Conflicts can causes principals or head teachers turnovers, leading to leadership disruption which interfere with students academic performance, Conflicts causes pupils or students retention and enrolment crisis affecting performance, Conflict at individual or school level causes destruction of schools properties, teaching and learning materials and Conflict causes school closure which interfere with learning calendars.

**Table 5: Extent to which conflict influence academic performance**

The Pearson correlation is used to establish whether there was a relationship between frequency of conflict witnessed in schools and students academic performance as indicated by teachers, head teachers and principals. The variable on academic performance was measured using previous Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education of the last year where the available teachers, head teachers and principals provided the data. The conflicts in school were indicated by number of conflict with in a week in the said schools involving students where the respondents approximated such instances of conflict whether mild or severe. It is important to know that the researchers did not just focus on strikes and arsons as the only manifestation of conflict in schools. The Pearson score was analyzed using three parameters, R and significance Kothari (2004) that R is coefficient of determination of the association between dependent and independent variable where by the absolute R equals to 1, therefore the bigger the R coefficient the more the size of the effect with negative R indicating the inverse relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The results from the findings indicated that association between dependent and independent

variable was significant at ( $p < 0.05$ ). 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 academic performance whereby as conflict of various form increased the performance decreases by 89.9%

		Frequency of Conflict in schools
K.C.S.E /KCPE Performance	Pearson Correlation	-.899**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	60

### Conclusion

Our results indicates that conflicts are caused by various causes as far as students and school are concerned and the gross effect of conflict in perspective of school performance is gross effect by reducing the chances or probability of passing KCSE which is a very negative predictor of future human capital development of the students at large , this is because as established beforehand 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

### Recommendations

From the findings and conclusion of the study the following were recommended, following confirmation that there is a direct relationship between schools conflicts and student performance where by from the findings there is a reverse and generic association between frequency of conflict and student performance where the more the conflict increases the more the academic performance deteriorate there it is imperative for school administration should with immediate effect come to terms with reality and manage these conflict as they arise , with understanding that the problem is not whether the conflict exist or not but how do you mitigate the conflict, identifying their patterns, root cause, background and dynamics. Capacity building on all stakeholders on conflict resolution need to be a priority which the best recommendation is training, the first group to trained on conflict resolutions should be the school administrators since they are the apex which provide harmony in the entire school, also train and equip teachers with conflict resolution skills at the very beginning and it should be a continuous process since also conflict are part of any organization like school. Students were also source of major conflict in school can be taught how to resolve conflict at manageable level before they escalate out of control. There is a need for schools management to establish a clear guidance on how to handle conflict in school, which can be done by having a school culture which encourage constructive conflict climate. Such guidelines are found in many organizational regulations. Having established the nature of conflict and the common type of conflicts as either task related and personal related it is important to have strategies which ensures that people know their boundaries, roles and responsibilities, whereby also a line need to be drawn to schools members on what they can do or not do when addressing conflict. Regular meeting and brainstorming can also be encouraged especially to mitigate on the hidden conflict where school



management can encourage all stake holders in the school to form a habit of airing their views. Finally the researcher can recommend that the best leadership styles for schools head should be the one that is receptive and adaptable and that is neither authoritarian nor permissive

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