

ASSESSMENT OF WHETHER GOOD COMMUNICATION BY THE PRINCIPAL CAN BE A CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHERS' JOB PERFORMANCE IN SELECTED PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KISII COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: This study assessed whether good communication by the principal can be a conflict management strategy for enhancement of teachers' job performance in selected public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya. The study was guided by the constructive controversy theory.

Statement of the Problem: Despite efforts made in Kenya to resolve conflicts in schools, such as conducting seminars and workshops around the country on the need to use human relationships to minimize conflicts, conflicts in secondary schools, especially in Kisii County, are still on the increase. Several schools in the county have experienced riots, strikes, and aggressiveness among students; violence against teachers, vandalism by students, arson, assault, students sneaking out of school, fighting among students, absenteeism, drug abuse, and examination malpractices.

Methodology: The study used a mixed-methods research approach and a descriptive survey design. The study targeted the County Director for education, school principals, and teachers in the County's public secondary schools. The target population consisted of 354 public secondary schools and 3,940 teachers. A sample size of 22 school principals and 357 teachers was selected using stratified random sampling, simple random sampling, and purposive sampling methods. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. To ensure validity, experts in conflict management were requested to take the instrument through a sound scrutiny to ensure that the items of the research instrument were consistent with the study's objectives. Reliability was tested using the split-half technique, and a reliability coefficient of 0.825 was realized. Quantitative data

was analyzed using SPSS version 25. Inferential statistics (correlation and regression analysis) and descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages, were used to analyze quantitative data. The data was presented using tables, graphs, and pie charts. Qualitative data was analyzed using a thematic approach and presented in the form of narratives and direct quotations.

Result: The findings of the study revealed that the principals' communication, creativity, motivation, and team spirit as strategies in conflict management positively influenced the teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Kisii County.

Conclusion: The study concluded that the communication strategies used by principals were useful in explaining teachers' job performance in Kisii County, Kenya.

Recommendation: The study recommends a related study to be conducted in other counties in Kenya to establish other conflict management techniques used by principals and their influence on teachers' job performance.

Keywords: *Communication, principal, conflict, management, strategy, enhancement, teachers' job, performance.*

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Conflicts are almost inevitable in human life. They are common in organizations as well as in learning institutions (Owan, 2018; Saiti, 2015). Throughout history, humans have always detested conflicts and found numerous strategies to resolve them, such as mediation and arbitration. Negotiations have been used to reach agreements regarding issues of contention between opposing nations or individuals (Kriesberg, 2009). Conflicts have gained many connotations because of their universality, which has left many managers confused about how best to deal with them. Conflicts build a stressful, disruptive, and uncomfortable working climate which affects employees' productivity (Kwapong, Opoku & Donyina, 2015).

Thakore (2013) describes conflicts as disparities between two or more individuals or groups, with each attempting to gain the approval of their opinion over others. Lussier (2015) agrees with Thakore that conflicts entail situations in which people are in battle due to opposing beliefs, cultural, political, or religious differences and philosophies of life. Conflicts can thus be interpreted as disputes or disagreements between two or more opposing parties with different interests, thoughts, opinions, principles, and goals. In learning institutions, Edet, Uduak, and Williams (2017) acknowledge that conflicts exist among individuals, including: students, teachers, non-teaching staff, and administrators. Similarly, Saiti (2015) points out that conflict can develop as a result of disparities in responsibilities, values, desires, and goals. Jones (2000) points out that the increase of conflicts from a low level to a very high-level leads to reduced organizational performance. Since conflicts are seemingly unavoidable, it is necessary for administrators to recognize them and find appropriate ways of dealing with them (Chanda, 2019).

Edwin (2013) contends that conflict management entails implementing specific measures to reduce the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict in order to enhance performance and effectiveness in an organization. Appropriate and effective conflict management strategies in schools reduce teacher dissatisfaction and absenteeism while increasing productivity, creativity, and innovation, all of which contribute to improved teacher performance. According to Johnson and Johnson (2017), constructive conflict management strategies offer solutions that are acceptable to all parties in conflict, strengthens relationships, and maximizes their ability to resolve future conflicts constructively.

Owan (2018); Abdul and Sehar (2015) stress that teachers play a crucial part in the teaching and learning processes and require a safe environment to fulfill their teaching obligations effectively. In line with this idea, Ghavifekr and Nair (2019) maintain that school effectiveness depends on the school principal's administrative skills, which must include the most effective conflict management strategies in dealing with conflicts that affect teachers' job performance. Owan (2018) stresses that; there is no single strategy for conflict management that can be applied to all conflict situations. Thus, it can be said that different conflicts require the principals to use different strategies.

Conflict management in schools has been studied globally with the aim of improving learning and group outcomes, such as organizational effectiveness or performance (Mongezi, 2018). According to Bounding (1962), many intellectual leaders of the late-seventeenth-century, notably in Europe and North America, addressed how to handle conflicts through reconciliation and use of awards. Jane Adams, for example, in the United States, led a number of non-Marxist and reformist attempts to achieve justice and prevent war-making. A study by Dawson (2018) revealed that in the USA, the sense of well-being and academic performance of students are negatively affected by conflicts between home and school. Riaz, Jamal and Latif (2019) observed that work-family conflict is negatively associated with job performance among Pakistan's front-line officials of Islamic banks. A study in the Bolu central district in Turkey by Göksoy and Argon (2016) found that teachers who have encountered conflicts have negative sentiments such as disappointment, insensitivity, tension, and discomfort, and may detest their professions, have low morale, motivation and reduced performance.

Many nations are gradually creating conflict resolution (CR) research institutes and organizations that provide CR services. For example, the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) was founded in Durban, South Africa, in 1991 and now operates throughout Africa. The cost of failing to prevent and halt destructive conflicts is increasing, and CR can assist in the development of more constructive conflict management and resolution strategies.

In Africa, conflicts in schools have been reported to cultivate chaos, disharmony, and to adversely impede the development of schools. The Sharpeville massacre of 1960 which affected many students in South Africa is such an example of conflict and the resulting chaos (Mongezi, 2018). In Nigeria, educational institutions were involved in violent confrontations between 1972 and 1990. A study in Ethiopia by Shanka (2017) indicated that there are many cases of conflicts involving teachers in schools and suggested possible conflict management strategies, including building leadership skills, teacher involvement in decision making, and understanding individual differences and roles.

In Tanzania, Ntide (2015) investigated how conflicts are managed by principals and teachers in schools, with a particular reference to Temeke Municipality. The study's findings showed that conflicts exist in most of the schools, and conflicts are felt as both constructive and destructive by most principals, while most teachers view them as unhealthy for the wellbeing of schools. The study further indicated that poor performance of both principals and teachers, differences in opinions among principals and teachers, management style of principals, differences in perceptions and favoritism are the main sources of conflicts that crop up between principals and teachers of schools.

The Kenyan government has enacted a number of laws, including the Employment Act, the Educational Act, and the Code of Regulation for Teachers, the Heads Manual, and Education Policies developed by various commissions such as the Mackay Commission (1981), the Kamunge Commission (1988), and the Koech Report (1999), as well as Task Committees, including the task force on re-aligning the education system with the Kenyan constitution of 2010, as sources of

management and administration guidelines part of which involves dealing with different conflicts that arise in the schools. The Ministry of Education (2002) report indicated that in spite of the government policies put in place, Kenyan educational institutions have continued to report increased cases of conflict. As per the Ministry of Education (2018), conflicts are constrained to secondary schools, middle-level colleges, and university institutions. Between 2008 and 2018, the number of conflicts in schools grew from 0.9% to 7.5%. In 2010, the government held a seminar around the country on the need to use human relationships to minimize conflicts in schools and society. Consequently, Teachers Service Commission (TSC) personnel at the zonal and school levels have also attempted to resolve conflicts. Despite this, it appears that most principals have failed to manage conflicts in their respective schools (MoE, 2018).

Research reveals that head teachers in Nandi Central District hold stakeholder meetings and consultations in their schools as a way of resolving conflicts, Kipyego (2013). A report by Kipyego revealed that 10 percent of Uasin Gishu's head teachers were transferred and 2% resigned their positions due to school conflicts. In Migori County, Kenya, Odhong (2014) found out that conflicts affect performance, and several strategies to improve conflict management were recommended, including collaboration and conflict management training. The study recommended further research to assess the effectiveness of conflict approaches and strategies in all Kenyan schools at all educational levels.

Nyabiage (2017) assessed how employee performance is affected by conflict management practices at the Nyamache tea factory in Kisii County, Kenya. The study revealed that employees are influenced by a range of elements, which include conflict resolution, performance results, team performance, and employee language. Similar research in secondary schools in the same country is missing. The majority of studies in Kenyan schools show that there is a critical need for effective strategies for conflict management (Owan, 2018; Odhong, 2014).

Kisii is a densely populated county with several secondary schools that have experienced conflicts. This is evident through riots, strikes, and aggressiveness among students; violence against teachers, vandalism by students, arson, assault, students sneaking out of school, fighting among students, absenteeism, drug abuse, and examination malpractices in secondary schools in the county (Riang'a, 2013). This mainly arises due to unresolved conflicts among individuals, including students, teachers, non-teaching staff, and administrators. Academic standards and performance have suffered as a result. There is an outcry from the parents and community as these conflicts have caused unwarranted tension, mistrust, hostility, and disruption to academic programs and teachers' disengagement from school activities. According to Nyakundi and Orodho (2020), conflicts in secondary schools in Kisii County have resulted in the dismal job performance of teachers in the county, as only 5% of the teachers are performing well. As such, conflicts are a clear indication that something is wrong with the organization and that sound principles are not being applied in managing the conflicts. School principals, as the top leaders, are expected to successfully manage these conflicts in order to improve performance. This poses a question about which conflict management strategies might be used by principals to improve teachers' job performance in Kisii County, Kenya. Therefore, this study sought to assess whether good communication by the principal can be a conflict management strategy for enhancement of teachers' job performance in selected public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite efforts made in Kenya to resolve conflicts in schools, such as conducting seminars and workshops around the country on the need to use human relationships to minimize conflicts, conflicts in secondary schools, especially in Kisii County, are still on the increase. Several schools in the county have experienced riots, strikes, and aggressiveness among students; violence against teachers, vandalism by students, arson, assault, students sneaking out of school, fighting among students, absenteeism, drug abuse, and examination malpractices. These conflicts manifest themselves through hostility between the school principals and teachers and even students, leading to disruption of academic programs, unwarranted tension, mistrust, and the massive withdrawal of teachers from active involvement in school activities (Riang'a, 2013). Conflicts have a destabilizing effect on school job performance if they are not well managed. Conflicts have resulted in the dismal performance of teachers in the county, as only 5% of the teachers are performing well (Nyakundi & Orodho, 2020). There is an urgent need to find the most effective conflict management strategies in this country to improve the performance of teachers in schools.

A number of studies reviewed concentrated on strategies such as collaboration, building leadership skills, withdrawal, accommodation, teacher involvement in decision making, and understanding individual differences and roles. However, scanty literature exists on whether good communication could be viable conflict management strategy that could be employed by the principals. Hence, this study will attempt to investigate the aforementioned strategy and how it influences teachers' job performance in selected public secondary schools, particularly in Kisii County, Kenya.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Assessment of whether good communication by the principal can be a conflict management strategy for enhancement of teachers' job performance in selected public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does the principals' communication as a conflict management strategy enhance teachers' job performance in selected public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

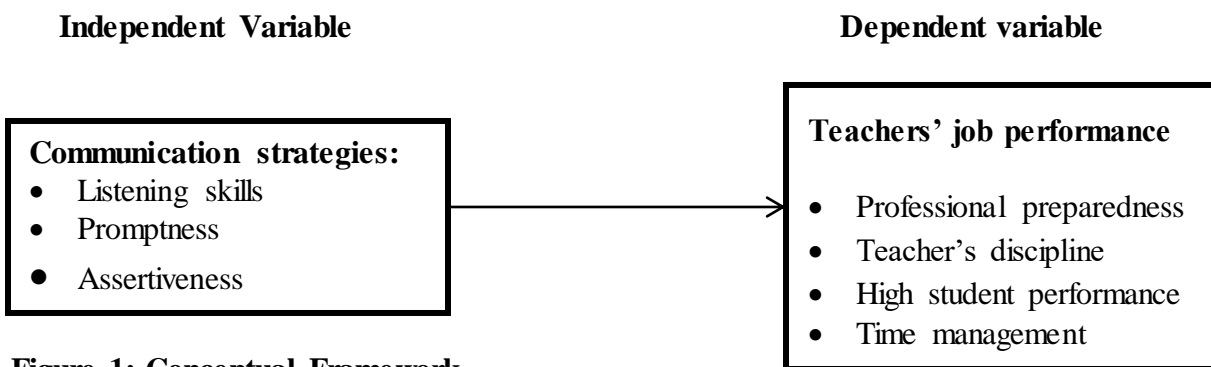


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher (2022)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored on Constructive Controversy Theory. The theory exists when an individual's ideas, interests, thoughts, opinions, principles, and the objectives contradict with those of others, and the two try to reach an agreement (Johnson & Johnson, 2007). Johnson and Johnson (1979) presented the constructive controversy theory as an effective strategy for settling conflicts and enhancing decision-making quality. The Constructive controversy theory relies on Deutsch (1977) theory of social interdependence and theories of cognitive development (Piaget, 1976). It is a "deliberate discussion" in which participants carefully weigh the benefits and drawbacks of the proposed actions to find creative solutions (Johnson, 2008). Intellectual conflicts may be beneficial, pushing people to seek new information and accept the perspectives of others. Constructive controversy is formed through consultative dialogues aiming at creative problem-solving. It contrasts with discussion, a competitive process in which one point of view "wins" over another, and the need for consensus, which suppresses opposition and alternative ideas. Constructive controversies generate innovative solutions and positive attitudes among participants. When disagreements arise in a cooperative setting, they are more likely to be productive. Participants must be skilled collaborators who adhere to collaboration norms and sensible argumentation standards. Critiquing ideas rather than people is required, as well as the capacity to perceive things from another person's perspective.

Constructive controversy theory differs from other conflict management theories in that it strives to give not only a solution to the conflicts, but also a better ending that meets the needs of all parties involved in the conflicts (Johnson, 2008; Johnson, 1979; Tjosvold, 2008; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2000). According to this approach, the principal will bring together opposing teachers to express their views and reach positive conclusions through procedures like rethinking, shifting perspectives, creative decision-making, as well as curiosity (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2000; Johnson, 2008; Johnson, 1979; Coleman et al., 2019). Since this more open approach to conflict management seeks to promote consensus and collaboration, both the principal and the teachers are more likely to feel optimistic about the issue and its management (Kuhn and colleagues, 2000). This is ideal for conflict management since it allows the disputants to try new approaches and develop positive attitudes.

Constructive controversy is essential for good decision-making. Decisions, by nature, are controversial (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). Intellectual conflicts may be constructive, prompting people to seek new information and accept the perspectives of others. Alternative courses of action are offered and assessed while making decisions, and then a consensus is established on which alternative would be the most successful in fixing the problem. This necessitates the principal's creativity in weighing alternatives and selecting the best choice among several options for settling conflicts.

According to Jiang et al. (2014), conflicting parties' efforts have a significant influence on team coordination. Constructive controversy theory allows school principals to resolve conflicts by building strong, functional teams within the school. Members of a system where people work together as a team believes that their accomplishments are constructively related, but only if the goals of the other members are met. (Tichy et al., 2010). This guarantees that each course of action is given a full and fair hearing, as well as a critical assessment of the benefits and drawbacks of pursuing it. The aim is to encourage members of the other advocacy teams to consider the alternate course of action's validity. Importantly, the members' mutual trust, support, and collaboration serve as complete mediators of the conflict management benefits on work performance.

Northouse (2016) emphasizes the importance of effective conflict management strategies in measuring employee performance. Effective communication between individuals and a commitment to finding acceptable results that benefit all parties are other characteristics of the constructive controversy method of conflict management (Rahim, 2015). Increased performance and retention, intellectual and moral thinking, decision-making, open-mindedness, creativity, participation in tasks, persistent motivation, attitude change, interpersonal connection, and self-esteem are all advocated for by the constructive controversy theory.

Johnson and Johnson (2017) demonstrate that constructive controversy theory is one of the most effective methods of enhancing creativity and innovation, information sharing, decision-making, teaching, and political discourse. Applied to this study, principals' conflict management techniques would impact teachers' work performance since constructive conflict leads to high task completion, work satisfaction, strong job performance, low desire to resign, and strong optimism for future cooperation (Almost, 2006; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Tjosvold, 1998; Tjosvold, Hui & Yu, 2003). As a result, there will be fewer conflicts and a more pleasant working atmosphere.

Conflicts cannot be avoided, but they can be managed by the application of constructive controversy theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2007). The manner in which conflicts are handled can influence productivity, efficiency, job performance, and turnover. Participating in the dialogue process teaches qualities such as accountability, honesty, insight and understanding, and concern for others (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). Furthermore, it instills a sense of empowerment, consensus, the need to have open-mindedness, mutual support and respect, and appreciation for organizational leaders. Teachers are more likely to establish better social ties and collaborate with each other when they participate in constructive controversy (Lu, & Hallinger, 2018). Advocacy teams are a practical, flexible strategy for encouraging cooperative, constructive conflict. Principals can utilize this approach to bring teachers into controversy since it teaches how to disagree honestly and use that difference to benefit everyone.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Research related to conflict management approaches has shown that communication skills are an important aspect of conflict management in enhancing job performance. Tyler (2016) performed a qualitative study on the communication styles of principals in Virginia's high-performing Title I elementary schools. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain data from eight principals, and publicly available statistics about these schools. The study's findings revealed that regular face-to-face communication, limited use of whole-school meetings, and the school principal's weekly attendance at class meetings with teachers were helpful in motivating teachers to achieve high levels of achievement. It revealed that communication skills are critical to building trust between principals and teachers, and that trusting interactions are important in leading teachers to successful teaching.

Since this is a qualitative analysis, data that would have been collected using a quantitative approach is lacking. This can be interpreted as a need to look at principals' communication skills using both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to improve teacher performance. The current study was the first of its kind to include more participants from various secondary school categories in order to investigate a broader range of issues concerning communication as a conflict management strategy and teacher performance in public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya.

Eisenkopf (2016) in his study on communication and conflict management found that even in a constraining context, communication is the most effective way of conflict management. The study

relied on the Tullock contest to model the conflict, which captures the essence of purely economic conflicts. This study used experimental data to test the strength of communication in conflict management in Germany. In most cases, experimental participants do not exhibit severe unfavorable feelings toward their opponents in such a contest. Many conflicts are fueled not just by economic causes, but also by perceived grievances. The current study was different as it looked at communication strategies like listening, accuracy clarity, confidentiality, assertiveness and promptness in conflict management for teachers' job performance in Kisii County, Kenya.

In Iran, Mahdih (2015) investigated the link between communication and organizational conflict, as well as its relevance to performance. As the statistical population, the research institutes overseen by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology were chosen. According to data collected from 22 institutions, there is a strong link between organizational communication, organizational conflict, and efficiency. Furthermore, a connection between organizational communication and performance was realized. This study provides important insights of the importance of communication in conflict management which corresponds to the current study. However, it was conducted among Iranian research institutions, and it would be appropriate to perform another study in a different Geographical setting to find out whether the results are compatible. The use of a non-probability convenient sample could also restrict the findings' generalizability. This research only targeted research institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology.

The current study employed both purposive sampling and simple random sampling to assess communication as a conflict management strategy for teachers' job performance in Kisii County, Kenya, with the view of allowing for more generalization of the findings. Public secondary schools of all categories were targeted in the current study.

Isik, Sunay, and Cengiz (2018) examined the relationship between internal communication and conflict management techniques in school administration and the perspectives of physical education teachers. 130 physical education teachers from public schools in the Turkish provincial center of Bartın participated in the research. The results showed a strong link between the interpersonal communication skills of school administration and conflict management techniques. This study only included Physical Education teachers who worked in state schools. The current study involved more teachers and principals from different categories of public secondary schools in Kisii County.

Kheswa (2015) explored the impact of poor communication on educators' teaching effectiveness in primary schools in the Fezile-Dabi District of South Africa Free State Province. A qualitative design was used in the investigation. Open-ended questionnaires were utilized to obtain data from six purposively chosen educators in a single primary school. Working with authoritarian leaders is a big weakness, according to the research, because there is no meaningful communication. This results in low motivation, disputes, and job discontent, all of which deteriorate the culture of learning and teaching (COLT). This study followed a purely qualitative design and collected data from six purposely selected teachers from one primary school. This sample is definitely not adequately representative to allow for the establishment of ineffective communication about teachers' job performance. The current study involved more participants to explore a broader variety of concerns related to principals' communication strategies in conflict management for teachers' job performance in Kisii County, Kenya.

Adejimola (2009) identifies communication as an essential non-violent strategy of settling conflicts. He believes that communication is essential in encouraging, avoiding, and resolving conflict. In Nigeria, Babatunde (2015) conducted a study on communication, conflict, and crisis

management with the goal of decreasing or resolving conflicts via productive and efficient communication. According to the study's results, efficient communication is at the foundation of effective crisis management. It went on to explain that constant and persistent communication is the best solution for crisis management. This study focused on reducing conflicts through effective and efficient communication. However, it did not consider how principals use communication strategies in managing conflicts. The current study differs from this study in the sense that it focused on how communication strategies of listening, accuracy clarity, confidentiality, assertiveness and promptness are used by principals in conflict management for teachers' job performance in Kisii County, Kenya.

According to Wanjama et al. (2006), most conflicts in schools are caused by poor communication, highlighting the need of individuals developing good communication skills. Kamande (2016) examined the effectiveness of communication for managing conflicts between administrators and teachers in public secondary schools in Gatanga sub-county, Murang'a county, Kenya. A descriptive survey design was used in the study. The sample was collected using a stratified random sample. Ten percent of the target population of 629 TSC teachers in 46 schools was chosen. This equates to 62 responses. Teachers and key respondents were polled using questionnaires and interview guide, respectively. According to the results, conflicts occur between teachers and administrators in Gatanga sub-county public secondary schools and communication plays an important role in creating, increasing and reducing conflicts.

This study obtained data from 62 respondents, which may be considered a small sample size to allow for generalization. This study is related to the current study because it sheds light on the value of communication in conflict management. However, the current study differs from this study in the sense that it included more participants to explore a broader variety of communication strategies used by principals in conflict management for teachers' job performance in Kisii County. The current research took into account various communication skills, such as listening, accuracy clarity, confidentiality, assertiveness and promptness, which have not been considered in previous studies. Although much has been published on effective communication in organizations, there seemed to be a paucity of literature focusing on educational institutions in Kenya, specifically in Kisii County.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed-methods research approach and a descriptive survey design. It targeted the County Director for education, school principals, and teachers in the County's public secondary schools. The target population consisted of 354 public secondary schools and 3,940 teachers. A sample size of 22 school principals and 357 teachers was selected using stratified random sampling, simple random sampling, and purposive sampling methods. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. To ensure validity, experts in conflict management were requested to take the instrument through a sound scrutiny to ensure that the items of the research instrument were consistent with the study's objectives. Reliability was tested using the split-half technique, and a reliability coefficient of 0.825 was realized. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 25. Inferential statistics (correlation and regression analysis) and descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to analyze quantitative data. The data was presented using tables, graphs, and pie charts. Qualitative data was analyzed using a thematic approach and presented in the form of narratives and direct quotations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that out of 357 teachers who were sampled and given questionnaires, 318 teachers (89%) filled out and returned the questionnaires. Out of the 22 principals who were selected for the study, 20 principals were available for interviews, hence a response rate of 91%. The County Director was available for an interview, hence constituting a response rate of 100%. The total response rate was 92%, which is recommendable according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2013), who assert that a response rate of 50 percent is adequate for data analysis and reporting; a rate of 60 percent is good; and a response rate of 70 percent and above is excellent.

Principals' Communication Skills as a Strategy in Conflict Management

The teachers were required to show their level of agreement or disagreement on the statements about principals' communication skills as a strategy in the management of conflicts in public secondary school in Kisii County. The findings are as shown on table 4, where the teachers used the scale of strongly Agree (SA) and Agree (A), Disagree (D) Strongly Disagree (SD) and undecided(UD).

Table 1: Principal’s Communication Skills as a Strategy in Conflict Management

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	UD
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
The principal listens actively to teachers to ensure mutual understanding.	7(2.2)	71(22.3)	157(49.4)	72(22.6)	11(3.5)
The principal communicates promptly and in a timely manner	5(1.6)	54(17.0)	164(51.6)	64(20.1)	31(9.7)
The principal always communicates with clarity	1(0.3)	25(7.9)	101(31.8)	169(53.1)	22(6.9)
The principal uses appropriate channel of communication	3(0.9)	19(6.0)	72(22.6)	116(36.5)	108(4.0)
The principal ensures Confidentiality in communication	64(20.1)	195(61.3)	17(5.3)	23(7.2)	19(6.0)
The principal is assertive in communication	9(2.8)	44(13.8)	143(45.0)	97(30.5)	25(7.9)
The principal’s listening skills in conflict management enhances teachers’ job performance	142(44.7)	109(34.3)	29(9.1)	11(3.5)	27(8.5)
The principal’s clarity in communication enhances teachers’ job performance	122(38.4)	170(53.5)	2(0.6)	6(1.9)	18(5.7)
The principal’s accuracy in communication enhances teachers’ job performance	104(32.7)	198(62.3)	3(0.9)	6(1.9)	7(2.2)
The principal’s confidentiality in Communication enhances teachers’ job performance	26(8.20)	62(19.5)	4(1.3)	4(1.3)	222(69.8)

Source: Research findings (2022)

As seen from table, most of the teachers 157 (49.4%) disagreed with the statement that principals listen actively to teachers to ensure mutual understanding. When principals fail to listen actively to the teachers, it poses a big challenge since principals, as leaders in public schools, must be able to listen to teachers if they are to help in resolving teachers’ issues. Tyler (2016) pointed out that listening is an important aspect of communication. It is critical in building trust between principals and teachers. In school leadership, trusting interactions between a principal and teachers are important in leading teachers to successful teaching and in conflict resolution.

The analysis of the results further shows that the majority of the teachers 164 (51.6%) disagree that the principal communicates promptly and in a timely manner. This finding expresses a big challenge in the management of conflicts in public secondary schools since timely communication in terms of feedback allows quick resolutions of issues among the teachers. Similar findings were

established by Min (2017), who also found out that timely communication is an important aspect in conflict management in any organization. Furthermore, more than half of the teachers surveyed 169 (53.1%) strongly disagreed that the principal always communicates with clarity. This is a serious flaw on the part of the principals because clear communication improves teacher connections and engagement. It also improves teacher trust and transparency, which is crucial to avoiding conflicts.

The Table also shows that a majority of the teachers 195(61.3%) agreed that the principal ensures confidentiality in communication. Confidentiality is vital because it protects the individuals' preferences and rights, which ensures peace among the teachers. This is supported by Eisenkopf (2016), who notes that confidentiality creates an environment of trust where teachers are free to discuss issues knowing that their privacy, personal integrity, and safety will be maintained throughout the process. Further, most of the teachers 143 (45.0%) disagreed that the principal is assertive in communication. Principals must be firm in their decisions if they are to influence the actions of the teachers. In an interview with one of the principals concerning the communication strategies used in conflict management, the principal narrated: "I listen to my teachers whenever there is a conflict without being judgmental towards any of the teachers involved in the conflict." This strategy has often helped me to be objective in solving conflicts that arise among teachers (Principal 4, 9th December, 2021). This response from the principal was supplemented by the response of the county director, who commented:

Listening is an important communication strategy in resolving conflicts. I often encourage principals of schools to listen to the teachers as this would help in understanding their needs, which in turn improves their performance. Principals who have applied listening as a skill in communication have managed to solve conflicts faster. I therefore wish that all my principals would use this strategy, as I consider it an important aspect of conflict management. I believe once conflicts are managed in schools, the teachers' performance will increase. (Principal II, 10th December, 2021).

The results also reveal that 142 (44.7%) of the teachers strongly agreed with the statement that the principals' listening skills in conflict management enhance teachers' job performance. In an interview with the county director for education, it was clear that listening is a pertinent yet neglected aspect of leadership. Kamande (2016) acknowledges that communication skills play an important role in creating, increasing, and reducing conflicts. Although the field of educational leadership has spent a significant amount of time focusing on the development of vision and mission, human relations, and communications in general, little effort has been invested in valuing and developing listening.

The study established that 27 (8.5%) of the teachers were undecided on whether the principals' listening skills in conflict management enhanced teachers' job performance. Teachers who were undecided on this statement could have been influenced by the confusion over what constitutes listening skills among the teachers. A study by Engdawork (2017) stated that the major conflict management strategies included building leadership skills and understanding individual differences and roles, which are archived through proper listening by the principals. In an interview, a principal narrated: "I endeavor to understand the causes of conflicts among my teachers." More often, I do this through active listening to their needs and interests, which gives me ideas on how to help them" (Principal 7, 12th December, 2021).

The study further found out that 139 (43%) of the teachers agreed that the principals' promptness in communication enhances teachers' job performance. 124 (39.0%) of the teachers strongly disagreed, while the minority of 3 (0.9%) disagreed with the statement. This finding relates to the

findings of Perpetua (2019), who established that effective communication techniques had an influence on teachers’ job performance and satisfaction. The table further shows that most of the teachers agree that the principals’ clarity in communication enhances teachers’ job performance. Clarity in principals’ communication helps teachers understand what is expected of them; hence, they are able to perform their jobs better and with confidence.

In addition, the study found out that 104 (32.7%) of the teachers agreed that the principals’ accuracy in communication enhances teachers’ job performance. 198 (62.2%) of the teachers agreed with the statement, and the minority disagreed with 3 (0.9%). Most teachers, 222 (69.8), were undecided on whether the principals’ confidentiality in communication enhances teachers' job performance. This finding relates to the findings of Mahdieh (2015), who investigated the link between communication and organizational conflict as well as its relevance to performance and found a strong link between organizational communication and efficiency among employees. The county director of education, in an interview, stated: "Conflict management in schools demands that principals develop some conflict management strategies. For instance, school principals need to be assertive and firm in dealing with teachers to enable them to improve their performance" (County Director, 10th December, 2021).

Teachers were further asked to respond to the statements intended to describe the extent to which they thought the principals’ communication skills enhanced teachers’ job performance in public secondary schools. The degrees of measurements used were: very great extent, great extent, moderate extent, small extent, and no extent. The data collected is presented in the table.

Table 2: Extent to which the Principals’ Communication Skills as a Conflict Management Strategy Enhanced Teachers’ Job Performance

Extents	Frequencies(f)	Percentages (%)
Very great extent	5	1.6
Great extent	39	12.3
Moderate extent	164	51.6
Small extent	85	26.7
No extent	25	7.9

Source: Research findings (2022)

The Table shows that out of 318 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, more than half of them, 164 (51.6%), stated that to a moderate extent the principals’ communication skills as a conflict management strategy enhanced teachers’ job performance in their schools. This finding was confirmed by the findings of a study by Perpetua (2019) on principals’ effective communication techniques on teachers’ job satisfaction in private secondary schools in Juja, Kiambu County, which found that effective communication techniques had an influence on teachers’ job performance and satisfaction. In an open-ended question, most teachers expressed the concern that there is limited clarity on the needs of their principals, which could have resulted in a feeling that their principals’ communication moderately influences teachers’ performance.

Correlation Analysis

In this section, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to establish whether any relationship exists between principals' conflict management strategies and teachers' job performance in selected public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya. The results are shown in the table.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis results

listening skills	0.380	0.049**
Promptness	0.962	0.003**
Assertiveness	0.000	0.467**
** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).		

Source: Researcher (2022)

Based on the Correlation analysis results, there is a positive, insignificant and weak relationship between listening skills of the principals and the teachers' job performance ($p \geq 0.05$). The study further established a positive insignificant relationship between promptness in the communication of the principals and teachers' job performance ($p \geq 0.05$). Additionally, it was established that there is a positive, significant and moderate relationship between assertiveness of the principals and teachers' job performance ($p \leq 0.05$).

Regression Analysis

The ANOVA results show that show that principals' communication strategies were satisfactory in determining teachers' job performance in selected public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya. This was shown by an F statistic of 114.150 and a p value (0.000), which is less than 0.05 significance level. The regression coefficients results indicated a positive relationship between principals' communication strategies and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Kisii County. The results show that a unit improvement in principals' communication strategies (listening skills, promptness in communication and assertiveness) lead to an improvement in teachers' job performance.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that some of the management strategies of the principals in managing conflicts are not implemented properly. For instance, it was found out that principals do not consider listening actively to teachers as a priority, which affects the performance of teachers. It was further revealed that principals do not communicate promptly, with clarity, and in a timely manner with their teachers, which affects the performance of teachers. However, it was established that principals ensure confidentiality in their communication with teachers. Teachers' job performance was enhanced by the principals' promptness, clarity, and accuracy in communication. The study further found out that there is a positive relationship between the listening skills of the principals and the teachers' job performance. Principals' empathy in dealing with conflicts was found to enhance teachers' job performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found out that principals do not consider listening actively to teachers as a priority, which affects the performance of teachers. Therefore, the researcher recommends that principals of schools consider listening to teachers as one of the vital aspects of communication that enhances the performance of teachers. The ministry of education should conduct training where teachers and principals will be taught skills in listening, which are vital in conflict management. The study further recommends a related study to be conducted in other counties in Kenya to establish other conflict management techniques used by principals and their influence on teachers' job performance.

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