

Conflict Mitigation in Enhancing Discipline in Kenya's Secondary Schools

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In any society, conflict is an endemic factor that shapes and determines relationship in all facets of life. Evidently, in a school community, conflicts are bound to occur given the different views, needs and values of the people. The study examines conflict mitigation in enhancing discipline in Kenyan secondary schools and is anchored on human needs theory. The study employed a descriptive survey design and embraced both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data from secondary school students, head teachers and guidance and counseling officers. The study concluded that the failure to train teachers on skills of conflict management and non involvement of students in decision making, are the causes of conflict in secondary schools. The study recommends that key conflict resolution and peacemaking skills should be introduced in schools and in management and training of teachers.

Key Words: Conflict, Management, Strategies, Discipline, and Students

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict is likely to occur two or more parties have incompatible goals or objectives. In other words, it is a struggle or competition between two or more people over values, status, power, and scarce resources. There are various causes of conflict in schools just as there are numerous methods of dealing with them. Some of the causes of conflict in secondary schools in Kenya and other countries include a lack of communication between head teachers and students, idleness, unsatisfied needs, a clash of home and school expectations, peer influence, bad examples from role models and domestic problems to name a few. All these elements can cause students to engage in deviant behaviour as they look for escape avenues. Examples of most common deviant behaviour among secondary school students in Kenya include: threats, rumours, verbal fighting, physical fighting, isolation by peers, bullying, rudeness, theft and peer pressure. Since there are many types of deviant behaviour in schools, teachers try their best to identify the causes so as to manage and resolve the conflict effectively. In order to gain more insight into causes of deviant behaviour among secondary school students, the current study has employed Burton's human needs theory. Burton (1990) postulates that failure or denial to satisfy basic human needs causes deep-rooted social conflict. The survival of human beings therefore, seems to depend on individuals' ability to satisfy their biological and material needs. Further, he observes that besides biological needs, there are basic human needs that relate to growth and development. Galtung (2000) holds that human needs are expected to be

satisfied within the norms of society and when this does not happen they are likely to lead to behaviour that is outside the legal norms of the society. A blocked goal leads to frustration which may result in conflict.

Sources of conflict

There are no general theories of conflict that cut across all situations. It therefore, follows that difficulties abound in conceptualizing conflicts. This is because every conflict possesses its own historical character. For instance, when internal factors interact with external factors, the interaction is likely to cause conflict because of interests in different values and goals (Okoth, 2000.2). In the same vein, when natural factors interact with human-made factors, the interaction is likely to generate conflict. Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish between internal and external roots of conflict. Moreover, the past has a significant bearing on the present. Hence, different forms of conflict have been orchestrated by internal and external factors on the one hand, and natural and home-made factors on the other hand. There are also domestic sources of conflict such as ideology, personality, internal power struggles and the mistreatment of some classes of peoples, such as minorities. These sources of conflict are experienced in most social settings including organizations such as schools.

Coon (1999) and Kriesberg (2003) explain that adolescents' misbehaviour is due to the rapid change in society. They observe that a society that is changing faster tends to have adolescents who are more tumultuous than a society that is relatively stable. Moreover, rapid change in customs and values affects the adolescents so much

that they are unable to keep pace with them and as a they result are thrown into confusion. When new ideas trickle into the minds of adolescents through various agents that are dissimilar and sometimes opposed to the traditional ones, conflict between the upholders of these new ideas and the defenders of the old values arise. Thus, Kriesberg continues to argue that human beings cannot survive without being nurtured and socialized in a social environment. During this process, individuals or groups may differ about values. As a result, a feeling of frustration may occur depending on the goals and intentions of those who regard themselves as being blocked. The offended party might become aggressive. This is likely to be the situation in Kenya today resulting from the introduction of modern schools with modern technologies that represent different cultures and profess divergent ideas on moral and socially acceptable behaviour.

Nature of conflict

Jeong (2010:3) and Galtung (2000:13) maintain that conflict is a complex process. It is manifested through adversarial social action, involving two or more actors with the expression of differences often accompanied by intense hostilities. The conditions of scarcity and value incompatibilities can become a continuing source of contention. This does not mean that every underlying conflicting relationship will be expressed with the same degree and kind of hostility or violence (Kriesberg, 1973:1, and Schellenberg, 1996:8). Conflicts vary in their bases, their outcomes and their consequences. Schellenberg (1996:13) opines that there are three factors that

influence conflict: attitudes, behaviour and contradiction. Each factor influences and is influenced by the others. The nature of conflict is dependent on how these three parameters are expressed. Attitudes include parties' perceptions and misperceptions of each other and themselves, and these can be either positive or negative. The operational expression of attitudes is hatred, distrust, apathy, or empathy. Behaviour can include cooperation or coercion, or gestures signifying conciliation or hostility. Violent conflict behaviour is characterized by threats, coercion and destructive attacks (Galtung, 2000:80). Contradiction is the incompatible goals of conflicting parties and can give rise to attitudes and behaviour regardless of the nature of conflict. This shows that conflict is a dynamic process in which attitudes, behaviour, and contradiction are constantly changing and influencing one another. It emerges as parties' interests come into conflict or the parties' relationship with one another breaks down.

The way a society is organized can create both the root causes of conflict and the conditions in which it is likely to occur (Haralambos and Holborn 2002:1037). Any society which is structured in a way that some members are treated unequally and unjustly is likely to erupt in conflict, especially if its members do not represent all the members of that society. Although there may be a precipitating event that brings opponents into confrontation, most conflicts arise from a complex set of factors that include the particular people involved; the history these people share, the dynamics of the social, political or

economic environment, and the specific issues about which people disagree.

Strategies for conflict management

Thomas (1976) provides five styles of conflict management. Two basic dimensions of behaviour that can produce conflict are identified: assertiveness in attempting to satisfy one's own concerns (organizational demands in the case of administrators) and cooperativeness, while attempting to satisfy others' concerns. From this analysis, five major perspectives have been identified and may be used in conceptualizing conflict and behaviour. These management styles include avoidance, accommodation, compromise, competition, and collaboration/integration.

Kriesberg (1982) explains that integration refers to the mutual involvement parties have with each other. The goals of the participants are so linked that any participant can attain his goal if, and only if, the others with whom they are linked can attain their goals. Deutsch (1973:20) argues that the crux of the difference between cooperation and competition lies in the nature of the way the goals of the participants in each of the situations are linked. In cooperation situations, the goals are so linked that everyone 'sinks or swims' together, while in competitive situations, one succeeds and the other one fails to achieve his/her goals. At one extreme the parties may be so interdependent that neither could survive without the other, or, in order for each to achieve what it wants, cooperation with the other is desirable or even necessary. This means, therefore, that their conflict with each other is about how to cooperate

and work together. At the other extreme, the adversaries may be almost wholly independent of each other. Each party can and does function with little exchange or any other kind of interaction with the other.

Indeed, Thomas (1977:309-325) and Sandy (2006:342) propose that each of the five management styles identified may be effective depending on the situation. The extent to which a given conflict handling approach is effective depends on the requirements of the specific conflict situation and the skill with which it is used. Thus, each of these strategies may be appropriate under different circumstances. Therefore, head teachers and teachers in secondary schools in Kenya should be trained in the skills of conflict management in order for them to be successful in solving students' problems. The common techniques used to control indiscipline problems in Kenyan secondary schools include a number of punishments such as suspension, expulsion, being detained in class, being asked to bring parents to school among others. Counselling of ill-disciplined student is also a common strategy for handling conflicts.

State of discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya

There has been a steady increase of student unrest in Kenya's public secondary schools. For instance, the Ministry of Education reported 69 secondary school strikes in 1974 and 254 strikes between 2000 and 2001. In 2008, more than 300 Kenyan secondary schools went on strike (Maina, 2008). During these strikes extensive damage was done to school property including loss of life. These riots

are more prevalent in Kenya's public secondary schools compared to private secondary schools. Some of the methods of conflict resolution used to manage include teachers' involvement in school governance, open days for parents to discuss issues with teachers, parents and students involvement of Board of governors, and Parents Teachers Associations, school counsellors, peace-keeping programmes, suspension of ill-disciplined students, and involvement of students in co-curricular activities. These techniques are normally employed in varying degrees but without a lot of success. It has been suggested that on the whole, students' complaints are ignored or suppressed by the school authority with threats of severe punishment such as suspension and expulsion from school. However, despite these threats, student unrest has continued to rise and therefore it was important to investigate the nature of unrest among secondary school students in public of Kenya, teacher preparedness to manage conflicts in schools and the perception of teachers and students towards management strategies utilized in handling conflicts.

The purpose and objectives of the study

The primary goal of the study was to establish the role of conflict in maintenance of discipline in public secondary schools. The specific objectives sought to:

1. establish the nature of conflict in different categories in public secondary schools in Kenya.
2. find out students' perceptions towards conflict management strategies employed in Kenya's public secondary schools.

3. establish the preparedness of teachers in the conflict management strategies used in public secondary schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conceived and conducted using a descriptive survey design with a mixed methods approach. The study is said to be descriptive because it assessed, analyzed and interpreted the various aspects of a phenomenon that already existed. The researcher used purposive and random sampling technique. Using simple random sampling techniques, 16 secondary schools and 649 students were selected from four (4) administrative Provinces of Kenya out of eight. The selected provinces included Central, Rift Valley, Eastern and Nairobi Provinces. Teachers and head teachers were purposely selected. The study used questionnaires and interviews to seek information from various sample groups of targeted respondents. Questionnaires were thought to be efficient because they are less expensive, take less time and allow collection of data from a large sample. They also allow uniformity in the questions asked in all the sampled population. In addition, questionnaires have the advantage of freedom of expression and anonymity. In addition, interviews were also thought to be useful because although they take a lot of time to administer, they provide clarification of the issues in the questionnaires. They also allow freedom of expression and have the advantage of allowing more information to be gathered from the interviewee. The data obtained was subjected to descriptive techniques.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are anchored on each of the research objectives. The results of the first objective that sought to find out the type of disciplinary problems that are prevalent in public secondary schools by school

categories are presented in Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4. We begin with the presentation of analysis with students' responses from boys' only secondary schools, followed by girls' only boarding school, mixed boarding schools, and mixed day and boarding schools.

Table 1: Disciplinary problems in Boys' Boarding schools– students' responses

Disciplinary Problem	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
Threats	56	35.2	35	21.8	38	23.9	30	20.1
Rumours	43	26.8	35	21.7	30	18.8	52	32.6
Verbal fighting	51	32.1	30	19.0	40	25.5	38	23.4
Physical fighting	62	39	40	25	25	15.4	32	20.6
Isolation by peers	70	43.6	32	20	31	19.3	28	17.2
Theft	25	15.7	25	15.7	38	23.6	72	45
Bullying	39	24.5	39	24.5	28	17.5	54	33.6
Rudeness	44	27.5	31	19.6	34	21	51	31.9
Peer pressure	46	28.6	26	16.4	31	19.3	56	35.7

(Primary Data, 2013)

The information captured in Table 1 shows that the common types of disciplinary problems among boys' schools include

theft (45%), followed by peer pressure (35.7%), bullying (33.6%) and rudeness (31.9%)

Table 2: Disciplinary problems Girls' boarding schools – students' responses

Disciplinary Problem	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	%
Threats	76	41	34	18.9	40	22.6	31	17.6
Rumours	26	14.8	19	10.8	46	26	85	48.4
Verbal fighting	58	32.7	21	12.1	39	22	51	33.2
Physical fighting	98	55.3	43	24.4	27	15.2	9	5.1
Isolation by peers	51	28.6	29	16.1	48	27.2	49	28.1
Theft	17	9.4	29	16.1	44	25	87	49.5
Bullying	46	25.9	27	15.3	38	21.3	66	37.5
Rudeness	36	20.3	29	16.6	41	23	71	40.1
Peer pressure	42	23.6	28	15.9	37	20.9	70	39.5

(Primary Data, 2013)

The results presented in Table 2 suggest that theft is a major problem in girls' boarding schools at (49.5%), followed by

rumours (48.4%), rudeness (40.1%) and bullying (37.5%).

Table 3: Disciplinary problems in schools: mixed boarding schools – students’ responses

Disciplinary Problem	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
Threats	53	36.7	27	18.8	29	20.3	35	24.2
Rumours	38	26.3	17	12	36	24.8	53	36.8
Verbal fighting	53	36.2	27	19.2	26	17.7	39	26.9
Physical fighting	58	39.7	34	23.7	26	18.3	27	18.3
Isolation by peers	49	34.1	27	18.9	32	22	36	25
Theft	22	15.5	22	15.5	42	28.7	58	40.4
Bullying	32	22.7	31	21.1	34	23.4	50	32
Rudeness	33	23.4	26	17.7	39	26.6	46	32.2
Peer pressure	32	22.6	24	16.5	39	27.1	49	33.9

(Primary Data, 2013)

The data in Table 3 indicate that in mixed boarding schools, theft was a major problem at (40.4%) followed by rumours

(36.8%), peer pressure (33.9%) and bullying (32%)

Table 4: Disciplinary problems in Mixed Day & Boarding schools– students’ responses

Disciplinary Problem	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
Threats	71	42.5	29	17.1	39	23.3	29	17.1
Rumours	58	34.5	37	22.1	28	16.6	45	26.9
Verbal fighting	66	39.5	32	19	33	19.7	36	21.7
Physical fighting	75	44.8	34	20.3	36	21.7	23	13.3
Isolation by peers	57	34.3	49	29.3	30	17.9	31	18.6
Theft	23	13.5	24	14.2	52	31	69	41.3
Teasing/insults	57	34.3	37	22.1	32	19.3	41	24.3
Rudeness	59	35.2	27	16.2	36	21.8	44	26.8
Peer pressure	44	26.8	31	18.3	36	21.8	55	33.1

(Primary Data, 2013)

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that theft is a common problem in mixed day and boarding schools (41.3%) followed by peer pressure (33.1%), and rumours (26.9%).

Head teachers’ and teachers’ counsellors’ perspectives on disciplinary problems in public secondary schools

After dealing with students’ responses on their perception of prevalence of different types of discipline problems by school

category, the analysis of the second objective which investigated teachers', students' and teachers counsellors' on their perceptions towards conflict management

strategies in schools is presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: Disciplinary problems in schools: Head teachers' perspective

Disciplinary Problem	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
Threats	6	42.9	3	21.4	5	35.7	0	0
Rumours	3	20	3	20	7	46.7	2	13.4
Verbal fighting	4	25	4	31.3	5	37.5	1	6.3
Physical fighting	3	20	8	60	3	20	0	0
Isolation by peers	2	14.3	4	28.6	4	28.6	41	28.6
Theft	2	13.3	2	13.3	6	40	5	33.4
Bullying	2	12.5	4	31.3	6	43.8	2	12.5
Rudeness	2	13.3		26.7	7	46.7	2	13.3
Peer pressure	0	0	3	18.8	5	37.5	7	43.8

(Primary Data, 2013)

The analysis contained in Table 5 reveals that according to the head teachers, peer pressure is a major problem in schools at

(43.8%), followed by theft (33.4%), isolation by peers (28.6%) and rumours (13.4).

Table 6: Disciplinary problems in schools: Guidance and Counselling officers' perspectives

Disciplinary Problem	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
Threats	5	30	5	30	6	40	0	0
Rumours	2	10	6	40	5	30	4	20
Verbal fighting	2	10	5	30	6	40	4	20
Physical fighting	3	18.2	5	36.4	6	36.4	2	9.1
Isolation by peers	0	0	2	9.1	9	54.5	6	36.4
Theft	1	7.7	3	15.4	5	30.8	8	46.2
Bullying	2	7.7	1	7.7	6	38.5	8	46.2
Rudeness	2	9.1	1	9.1	9	54.5	4	27.3
Peer pressure	1	7.7	0	0	3	15.4	12	77

(Primary Data, 2013)

The data presented in Table 6 given by guidance and counsellors on the frequency of different disciplinary problems indicate that peer pressure at (77.0 %) is a major problem followed by theft (46.2); bullying

(46.2), isolation by peers (36.4%) and rudeness (27.3%).

Overall, information contained in Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 shows that theft is a major

problem in all the categories of secondary schools, followed by peer pressure and rumours. Threats were not as common as other forms of disciplinary problems. However, they were more common in mixed boarding schools at (24.2%). Rumours is a common problem in girls' schools (48.4%) compared to boys' schools (32.6%). Verbal fighting was frequent in girls' schools (33.2) compared to boys' schools (23.4). Physical fighting was experienced more in boys boarding schools (20.6%), and mixed secondary boarding schools (20.6%) than in girls' schools (5.1%). In girls' schools, there were more cases of isolation by peers than in the other categories of the schools with (28.1%). The results of managers of schools (head teachers and counsellors) have concurred with the students' responses that theft, rumours and peer

pressure were major problems in schools. However, the head teachers indicated that there were no other problems in their schools, while the counsellors contradicted them when they indicated that verbal fighting, bullying and isolation by peers were experienced in schools. This implies that the head teachers were not aware of all the problems in their schools and this seems to suggest that they are not equipped with knowledge and skills for identifying conflicts among students.

Head (2010) and Archer (2010) support the findings of the study when they lament that in Britain, minority ethnic students experience verbal, stereotyping, and physical violence in schools. Snodgrass (2005:58) opines that violent incidents in schools in South Africa include stealing and brawling among others.

Perceptions of students on conflict management strategies used in public secondary schools

The second objective sought to find out students preferred strategies for the

management of conflicts. The findings are contained in Table 7.

Table 7: Strategies for controlling conflicts in schools- Students' view

Type Of School	Boys boarding		Girls boarding		Mixed boarding		Mixed day and boarding		Overall	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Time out of class	26	17	24	14	22	16	28	16	100	15
Detention	25	16	29	16	23	17	28	16	105	16
Counselling by a friendly teacher	41	24	45	25	32	23	40	23	158	25
Contacting parents	29	19	33	18	26	18	30	17	118	18

Suspension	19	13	28	16	20	14	26	15	93	14
Expulsion	17	11	19	11	17	12	22	13	75	12
TOTAL	15	10	17	10	14	10			64	10
	7	0	8	0	0	0	174	100	9	0

(Primary Data, 2013)

The data presented in Table 7 indicate that most of the students irrespective of their category of secondary school they were attending favored, counselling by a friendly teacher with (24%), followed by contacting parents (18%), detention (16%), time out of class (15%), suspension (14%) and expulsion (12%).

Preparedness of teachers in conflict management

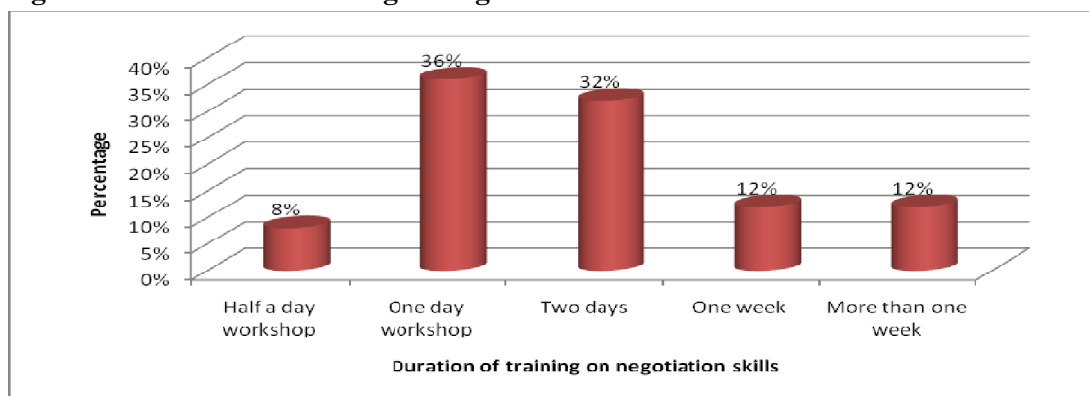
The third objective of the study sought to establish the extent to which teachers were prepared to handle conflict management through training and whether mediation programmes existed in schools. The pertinent results show that the majority of

teachers (72.9%) had not attended any course on conflict management. This shows that a large majority of the teachers lack training in conflict management knowledge and skills. A lack of conflict management skills among teachers and managers of secondary schools may explain why indiscipline among students is common in public secondary schools in Kenya.

Duration of training on negotiation skills for teachers

The study again solicited information from teachers in respect to duration of their training in negotiation skills. The results are depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Duration of training on negotiation skills for teachers



(Primary Data, 2013)

The analysis presented in Figure 1 has revealed that 8% of teacher respondent had attended training on negotiations for half-day, 36% for one day and 32% for two days. The rest of the respondents 12% and 12% said that the training on negotiation

skills had lasted for one week and more than one week respectively. These results clearly show that teachers who have been entrusted with helping students, who are, generally faced with adolescent challenges of growing up, had not devoted adequate time required to acquire conflict

management and negotiation skills. It is not therefore surprising that schools experience unrest because teachers are not equipped with relevant skills to assist students to deal with inevitable personal and social related challenges.

Headteachers' responses on presence and preparedness of peer mediation programme in the schools

The study further requested head teachers respondents to state whether there was peer mediation programme in their schools. The findings have revealed that 68.3% of teacher respondents did not have a peer mediation programmes in their schools. These results suggest that secondary school students have not been provided with sufficient mechanism to handle conflicts that confront them, such as stealing, rumour mongering, bullying, verbal and physical fighting among others. A lack of peer of mediation in public secondary schools may explain why conflicts are prevalent. These conflicts often lead to student riots and closure of educational institutions.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The study established that 72.9% of the teachers had not attended any conflict management training. This implies that most of the teachers do not have skills on conflict management, negotiation, and mediation skills necessary for conflict management in school situation. In addition, interval of training in mediation and negotiation was not regular and was of a short period. In particular training on

negotiation skills were normally done as a one day workshop. One day of training is likely to be ineffective and unsuccessful. Further, the study revealed that majority of schools (68.3%) had no peer mediation programmes. Studies by other scholars ((Snodgrass, 2005; Okotoni, 2003; and Iravo, 2010) have observed that school administration has been affected by a lack of knowledge and skills related to conflict management.

Conclusion

The study findings have clearly indicated that knowledge and skills pertinent to conflict management in Kenya's public schools are inadequate. This is attributed to the fact that most of headteachers of public secondary schools have not been trained to run schools and to handle students' conflict. In addition, there is not sufficient infrastructure for students such as peer counselling to assist them deal with conflict resolution among themselves.

Recommendations

On basis of the findings and conclusion discussed hereabove the following recommendations have been made.

- a) The study recommends that teachers should involve students in conflict resolution. Students have more information on the causes of conflict and can play an important role in coming up with solutions to the problems they encounter. Conflict management should be an all-inclusive exercise involving parents and the society in general. Involvement of parents and the entire society will ensure that students' needs are met both inside and outside the school.

- b) The study further recommends that teachers should encourage their students to seek guidance and counselling services. Students should be sensitized on the importance of seeking help from teacher counsellors. Most public secondary schools have teacher counsellors, though they are not adequately equipped for the job. Sensitising students on the role of teacher counsellors is also likely to enhance the increase the number of students who seek guidance and counselling services.
- c) The study also recommends training of teachers and head teachers in conflict management skills in order for them to learn how to help students who are psychologically and emotionally disturbed. Trained teacher counselors are more likely to have a better understanding of challenges encountered by students. Moreover, training helps teachers to design better approaches towards solving problems facing different categories of students.
- d) Similarly, students should be taught essential life skills which will help them manage their socio-emotional problems so that they can relate well with their peers. This is expected to reduce frustrations which make them take revenge by destroying school properties, stealing, bullying their colleagues and physical fighting among others.
- e) The study recommends inclusion of conflict management programme into the training of teachers in order to equip them with skills on conflict management as well as negotiation skills and mediation skills.
- f) The study recommends that a mass campaign on peer mediation skills be undertaken in schools in order to create awareness among teachers and students on the value of such skills. Finally, peer mediation programmes should be initiated in all secondary schools in Kenya with the aim of helping teachers and students to manage conflict that may arise from interaction with others.

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