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Role of Head Teachers and Teachers in Managing Conflicts during the 2008 post Election Violence Period in Secondary Schools in the Rift Valley Region, Kenya

By Lydia C. Kipkoech and Alice Limo

Abstract

Africa is rich in diversity but peace has remained elusive due to historical factors and poor leadership. Kenya has witnessed periods of violence every election period since 1992. The worst of the election violence experienced took place at the end of 2007 and beginning of 2008. The study sought to establish the role of head teachers and teachers in managing and resolving conflicts arising from the post election violence of 2007/08. The study was guided by the systems theory attributed to David Easton. The study adapted quantitative and qualitative methodologies which included collection of numerical and statistical data and use of narratives that drew from personal experiences and descriptive survey research design. Purposive random sampling was used to select 20 schools in 4 districts and stratified random sampling to select 274 respondents to constitute a sampling unit and a unit of analysis. Data was collected using Survey questionnaires, face to face interviews, observations and document analysis. The study also used descriptive statistics to determine and explain proportions. Chi-square was used to test whether or not two variables were independent of each other. The findings revealed that the head teachers and teachers played a great role in making students settle in schools by counseling and guiding them despite the fact that many of them lack skills in management of conflict. The study recommends training of teachers on conflict management.

Key words: Kenya, Education, Elections, Head teachers, Students, Violence, Rift Valley

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Introduction

School systems seek to inculcate certain basic values and attitudes, such as honesty, respect, for the truth, and for other individuals, self-discipline, and the capacity to identify right from wrong according to criteria of principle and not of expediency (Thompson, 1981). On the other hand, the society ought to establish structures which personal and social differences can be identified and worked out. The structures should also be all inclusive because it is only when the root causes of the differences are explored and resolved that peace can be achieved. Furthermore, the structures need to be accepted and owned by all.

The ethnic and post election violence was a sign that many things needed to be addressed for Kenyans to coexist. Promises are made during the campaigns that corruption will be a thing of the past but it still remains. Patronage politics, the political manipulation of ethnicity and sharp horizontal inequalities have reinforced an undercurrent of ethnic tension in Kenya. Less obvious prior to 2008, these tensions were brought to the surface by the post-election violence. Ethnicity has now become the dominant identity in Kenya, even amongst the middle class, leading to high levels of fear and mistrust between communities.

Education can be a tool needed to bring about change of perception of other citizens and the future of this country. Schools can teach children how to cooperate, share and help others because assuming that children learn these competencies outside the school is not sound (Johnson and Johnson, 1995). This can be done through provision of a curriculum that emphasizes on the need to view the other student, or neighbour as a Kenyan and therefore a brother. Through education curriculum the students can undergo a process of being made to be patriotic and nationalistic such that, their allegiance should first be to their country and not their tribes as the case is today. A good education system therefore, triggers responsible development culturally, spiritually, politically and economically. The school will produce graduates that will champion justice, fairness, love, care, and reconciliation. 'Role models are those mentored by their parents, families in impeccable values in order to influence their neighbourhoods, religious communities and the larger world community' (Bigambo 2009).

The root cause of political conflicts in Africa is not the presumed historical inter-ethnic animosity and hatred but the skewed manner in which resources are allocated. Poor leadership especially where the incumbent serve their own interests and disfavour others invites conflicts. There is need to harmonize diversity of interests and diminishing potentials for ethnic antagonism that invariably lead to conflicts. Equality of all groups should be ensured with more emphasis laid on civil liberties including equality before the law among others. This was because the PEV appeared to be a problem of the rich verses the poor within each ethnic community. This view is supported by Richardson and Sen (1996) when they point out that it is typical of ethnic conflict to have an intra-ethnic and inter-class dimension as a way of solidifying the group as a strategy for greater militarized conflict.

Thus, one way of alleviating tribal animosity is to prioritize economic growth. However in the course of controlling overt violence it can perpetuate covert or structural violence. The structural violence is the social and personal violence that arise from unjust, repressive and oppressive national or international political and social structures (Galtung, 1969). Kamugisha (2006) specifies what disorients and dehumanizes society.

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It is not only war that destroys peace but every action that is against one's life is something against peace...The enemies of peace have their homes in our hearts, and these are gluttony, covetousness, struggling for power, jealousy anger, and pride. If these enemies were to be expelled completely, we would enjoy the lasting peace .Other enemies are revenge, war, preparation for war, drug abuse, rape, abortion, enslavement, and oppression to mention but a few.

Teachers are agents of change .In a volatile situation, they are looked upon by many people in the society to give directions. In the school environment they are best placed to preach peace and reconciliation. This view is supported by D'Souza (2007) who adds that, leaders need to learn the skills involved in managing and resolving conflict constructively. Unresolved conflicts have caused individuals to flounder and organizations to fail. Lack of harmony in place of work can be harmful and lead to wastage .Teacher stress is the unpleasant experience, negative emotions, and distress that exist when the problems confronting teachers threaten their well-being, and surpass their ability to resolve them (Litt and Turk, 1985).

The effectiveness of each step must be capable of being traced back to the teacher or manager who is responsible (Owen, 1992).The school management has to be clear about the influences to which they respond. They also need to be encouraged to share judgments about the weight which is to be given to tightly organized professional activities and to less definable influences from a neighborhood and a community. Managers are under obligation to be consistent, credible and intelligible. They have to be clear about how they can take account of differences of attitude, mind, and personality on the part of those whom they work with.

Objective of the study

The objective of the study was to determine the role of the head teachers and teachers in resolving conflicts during the post election violence of 2008.

Theoretical framework

The study was be guided by the systems theory. Schools are open systems hence they are affected by what happens within its environment. The systems theory puts emphasis on the relationship between the school and the environment. Hanson (2003) further adds that it receives inputs such as human and material resources ,values community expectations and societal demands; transforms them through a production process (for example class activities);and exports the product (for example graduates ,new knowledge ,revised value sets) into the environment with value added.

The schools are part of the larger environment hence anything that happens in the larger environment affect the school and vice versa. Those who participated in the violence witnessed were graduates of the schools hence it would appear that the schools have failed to inculcate nationalism and unity in diversity among its products.

This will depend on the ability of the schools to effectively and efficiently gather space, process, and utilize information. Organizations cannot generate internally the needed resources because these must come from the environment. Schools must enter into exchanges and competition with environmental units to obtain the requisite products and services. Hoy and Miskel (2005) assert that, because environmental uncertainty and scarcity of resources threaten organizational autonomy and effectiveness administrators often attempt to develop

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strategies to gain more control over the environment. Schools therefore have to conform to powerful sets of values and requirements that the legal, social, professional and political institutions impose.

The school structures and processes mirror the norms, values, and ideologies, institutionalized in society. As a result, educational planners must consider the ability of the educational system itself to cope with any changes which might be recommended. It is certainly a waste of time and resources for educational administrators to be saddled with the responsibility of implementing and managing changes which might be beyond the capacity of that system, at a given point in time (Bacchus, 1987).

Research methodology

Research Design

The study was a descriptive survey. Peil (1982) states that survey methods are a useful source of information on population distribution, attitudes, and behaviour (demographic data, housing, family planning, voting, migration, educational, and occupational aspirations, friendship networks). Surveys can therefore provide reliable, valid and theoretically meaningful information. According to Kerlinger (1969), descriptive studies are not only restricted to fact findings, but may often result in the formulation of important principles of knowledge and solution to significant problems. They are more than just a collection of data. They involve measurement, classification, analysis, comparison, and interpretation of data. Descriptive survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals (Orodho, 2003).

Target population

The target population was secondary schools, teachers, students and interest groups in Rift valley province in Kenya. The secondary schools in the region were selected because they were the most affected during the post election violence. These participants were included because they were directly affected and involved in the management of schools after the Post Election Violence.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Purposive random sampling was used to select 4 districts that included: Wareng, Naivasha, Bomet and Trans-Nzoia, Purposive was used to select particularly the schools that were adversely affected by the Post Election Violence. Simple random sampling was used to select 5 schools from each district to make a total of 20 that participated in the study. This sampling technique was used because it was easier, less costly and gave equal chances to each departments of being selected in the sampling unit. Stratified random sampling was used to select 20 head teachers, 60 teachers, 180 students, 4 district education officers and 10 interest groups comprising members of churches and other organizations that assisted schools during the post election violence. This sampling technique was used because the unit of analysis consisted of sub-groups or strata that differed in characteristics. Therefore, the use of this technique improved representativeness and also enabled the researcher to study the differences that existed between various sub-groups.

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Data collection Instruments

The study developed and used various data collection instruments including the questionnaire, interview schedule, and observation schedule and document analysis.

Data analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques were used. The qualitative techniques were used to answer the why and how questions whereas quantitative techniques analyzed figures for purposes of making descriptions and inferences. The data collected during the interview was analyzed in the field. This includes categorization and reduction of data into key themes to identify meanings.

Discussion of findings

The data presented, analyzed and interpreted in this section indicates whether or not head teachers' and teachers played any role in resolving conflicts in schools after the Post election violence).

a) Teachers involvement in conflict management after the PEV

The study examined whether or not head teachers and teachers played any role in resolving conflicts in schools after the Post Election Violence (PEV) Rift valley Province. The results indicated mixed feelings. It was found out that 92 (53.2%) of the students' felt that they were not assisted by the teachers and head teacher to cope with the PEV while 59 (34.1%) agreed. This possibly means that the impact of any assistance given was not felt. These differences in perceptions between the students were not statistically significant at 5 % significance level ($\chi^2(173) = 2.983, p > 0.05$). The study therefore, concludes that students were not assisted by head teachers and teachers to resolve their conflicts after the PEV.

b) Training on Conflict Resolution before the PEV

The study examined whether or not the teachers and head teachers were trained on conflict resolution before the PEV. From their responses, majority 13 (65.0%) and 33(55.9%) of the head teachers and teachers respectively indicated that they are not trained on conflict management and resolution. From the results of the head teachers, it was found out that a no significant difference was found in their responses ($\chi^2(20) = 13.407, p < 0.05$).

This implies that the responses from respondents vary. The Eta squared suggests that about 79.2% of the variance in respondents receiving of the training on conflict management before the PEV could be attributed to the number of years of service in school. This can be interpreted that there were no significant differences in the head teachers' respondents' opinions. Yet this early knowledge of conflict resolution would have been vital, since some students had lost their teaching and learning materials and were angry and bitter they need specialized persons to give group therapy sessions especially for the traumatized victims who had witnessed the killing of relatives in their home area while they were fleeing for their lives. The psychosocial care counseling of students would have also assisted the students to assure them of security and their future in schooling. Table 1 below further demonstrates that the teachers shared similar views with regard to training on conflict management

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Table 1. Teachers View on Training on Conflict Management

		Value	Df	Asymp.Sig (2-sided)	Exact sig.(2- sided)	Exact sig.(1- sided)
Teachers	Pearson Chi-Square	4.144(b)	1	.271		
	Continuity correlation(a)	3.080	1	.079		
	Likelihood Ratio	4.155	1	.042		
	Fisher's Exact Test				.053	.040
	Linear-by-Linear Association	4.073	1	.044		
	N of Valid Cases	59				

On their involvement, in the organization of guidance and counseling for the students and the teachers in schools, the study found out that 15(75.0 %) of the head teachers' indicated that they held group counseling sessions for students and staff 5(25.0 %) did not. They were also asked to indicate the persons who provided the counseling services. From their responses majority, 10 (50.0 %) invited experts to provide counseling, 6 (30.0 %) let the teachers counsel, while 4 (20 %) involved parents. However 3(15.0 %) relied on the church (sponsors), Education officers, NGO representatives, and other visitors respectively. Few 2 (10.0 %) involved the Provincial Administration.

However, both the head teachers and the students were asked to indicate what they thought was the impact of their guidance and counseling provided on the students. Majority of the head teachers 12 (60.0 %) indicated that the students overcame trauma, 5 (25.0 %) indicated that the students were able to forgive those who wronged them while 3 (15.0 %) indicated that they were yet to see the impact. Only 1 (5.0 %) indicated that they tolerated and reconciled. Table 2 shows the head teachers and students response to guidance and counseling.

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Table 2 Provision of guidance and counseling for students

		Students response		Head teacher	
		Frequen cy	Percentag e	Frequen cy	Percen tage
Guidance and counseling offered	Yes	123	68.3	15	75.0
	No	55	30.5	5	25.0
	Total	178	100.0	20	100.0
Persons who offered the counseling	Teachers	97	53.8	6	30.0
	Preachers	32	17.7	3	15.0
	Resource persons	21	11.6	10	50.0
	Provincial administration	4	2.2	2	10.0
	Provincial administration	7	3.8	3	15.0
	Parents	26	14.4	4	20.0
	Other visitors	10	5.5	3	15.0
	Ngo representatives	11	6.1	3	15.0
Impact of the counseling	Change of attitude	39	21.6	2	10.0
	Tolerance	12	6.6	1	10.0
	Forgiveness	29	16.1	5	25.0
	Overcame trauma	26	15.0	12	60.0
	Reconciliation	68	38.3	1	5,0
	None	43	23.8	3	15.0

Similarly, the findings revealed that teachers and head teachers being assisted by NGOs were involved in active tracing and follows in all major camps and children homes as well as registration and interviewing of students in order to make them settle in school, as Mwaura a teacher participant narrates:

In early days of the post election violence emergency, the tracing team of teachers and interest groups was able to help stranded students to locate their families and get back to school. After the situation calmed the teachers have been helping students in restoring family links (TR: February, 26, 2009).

On the impact of guidance and counseling given in schools, 98 (54.0%) of the students indicated that there was reconciliation, 36 (20.0%) there was change of attitude, 28 (15.6%) forgiving while 26(14.4%), overcame trauma and 25 (13.8%) tolerance. However 41 (22.7%) indicated that the guidance and counseling had no effect.

Assistance of Traumatized Teachers

The study sought to establish whether or not teachers' were assisted to cope up with the effects of PEV. The results indicated that 18(30.5%) of the teachers were provided with guidance and counseling, 7(11.9%) were provided with shelter in the school compound while 6(10.2%) were assured of security. Also 5 (8.5%) indicated that their schools were closed until calm returned and 5 (8.5%) indicated that the schools provided them with financial assistance. It was found out that 14(23.7%) indicated that the schools assisted them by

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facilitating their transfers to other institutions. 1(1.7%) indicated that the school organized talks on reconciliation. One of the respondents Dulo stated that;

One of the teachers received threats to vacate his home. Another teacher had his house vandalized and household property looted. He is now living with friends as he comes to school to teach. His parents are living in the displacement camp in Eldoret. Fellow teachers have expressed solidarity with their colleague and assisted them with clothes. Yet another teacher had her house vandalized (TR, March 23 2009).

The strategies adopted by the head teachers towards managing teachers is further demonstrated in figure 1 below.

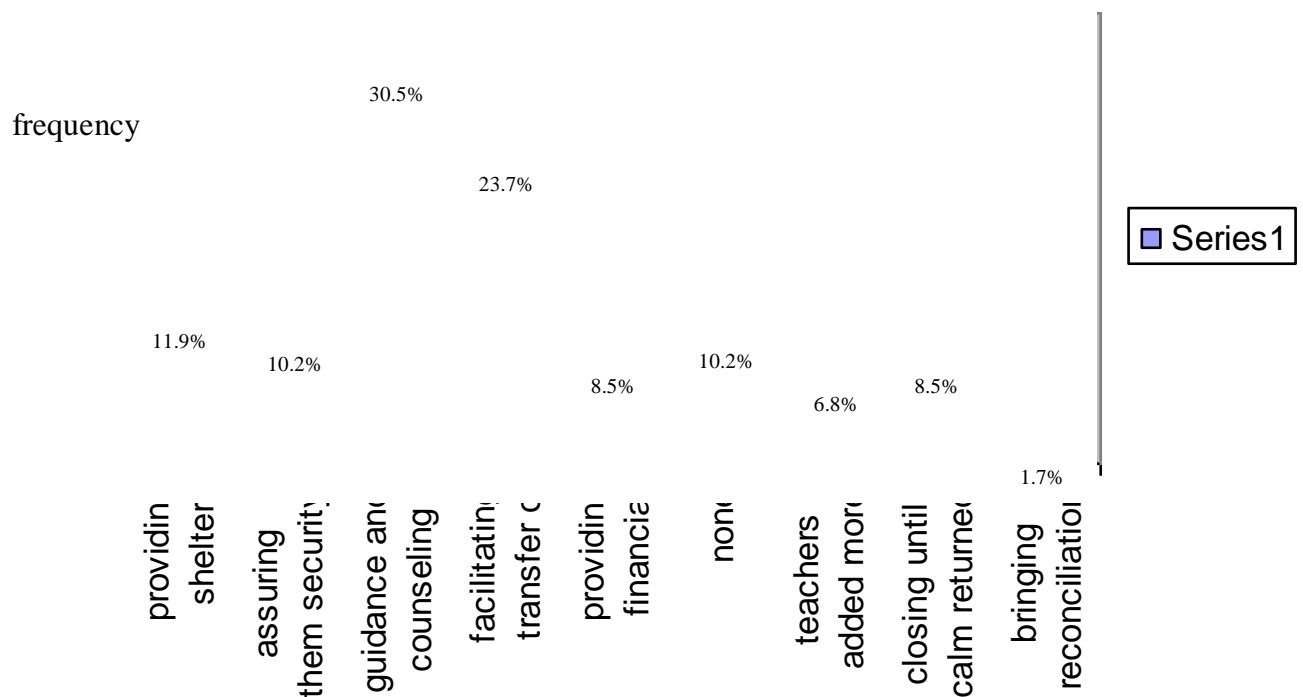


Figure 1. Strategies adopted in managing teachers during and after the PEV

Challenges faced when reconciling students

The study sought to find out the challenges faced when head teachers and the teachers were counseling students and attempted to broker peace among them. The findings from the head teachers are indicated in the Table 3 below:

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Table 3. Challenges faced when reconciling students

		Head teachers		Teachers	
		Frequency	% cent Response	Frequency	% cent Response
1	lack of skill in conflict management	7	35.0	33	55.9
2	feared being branded traitors and groupings along tribal basis in the schools	5	25.0	28	47.5
3	lacked funds and received threats	4	20.4	29	49.2
4	faced hostility from victims of the violence	3	15.0	27	45.8
5	loss of property and transfer of teachers	3	15.0	18	30.5
6	feared politicians	2	10.0	19	32.2
7	feared loss of responsibilities	1	5.0	16	27.1
8	faced no challenges	4	20.0	26	44.1
Total		20		59	

The study revealed that that 7 (35.0%) of the head teachers indicated that the greatest challenge was the lack of skill in conflict management, 5 (25.0%) feared being branded traitors and groupings along tribal basis in the schools, 4 (20.0%) lacked funds and received threats and faced no challenge respectively, 3(15.0%) indicated that they faced hostility from victims of the violence, loss of property and transfer of teachers while 2(10.0%) feared politicians and 1 (5.0%) feared loss of responsibilities.

On further probing during the face to face interviews, the teacher respondents' indicated that suspicion from the 'other' members of the community was a major challenge. He narrated his experience in this way:

We feared brokering peace in schools for fear of being branded as the 'traitor' by students' and members of our own communities. This is because of the rumors being peddled that those who were calling for reconciliation were sympathizers of the opposing camps. (TR: 26th February 2009).

Similarly, majority of the teachers 33 (55.9 %) also agreed that the lack of skill in handling conflicts was their greatest challenge .This was followed by 29 (49.2%) who lack of funds,28 (47.5 %) feared groupings on tribal basis, while 27(45.8%) indicated hostility from the victims as a challenge. Twenty six [26] representing 44.1%, however did not have any challenge Twenty one [21] (35.6%) indicated that they received threats and 19(32.2%) feared politicians and loss of property respectively. Eighteen [18] (30.5 %) indicated that the transfer of staff and few 16(27.1) indicated that they feared being transferred.

Conclusion

The study concludes that schools organized debriefing sessions for the students to enable them overcome the trauma associated with the loss they incurred and the general effect of the violence on them. However, the study established that the teachers were not trained in conflict

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management hence, most of those involved in peace building and reconciliation used ad hoc approaches which did not work. The study concludes that the reconciliation efforts did not quite succeed because those expected to do it lack the necessary skill to do it.

Recommendations

From the findings, this study suggests the following recommendations: There is need to introduce courses that cover emerging issues such as conflict prevention and management in the curriculum. This may prove useful for both the teachers and the learners. The Ministry of Education ought to involve itself or encourage the establishment of a continuous in-service training for the teachers that focus on emerging issues. Those in pre-service training require training in conflict management.

The Ministry of Education could also avail a social worker in every school to cater for the social challenges facing both teachers and students as a result of the violence. This is because not many of the students and teachers affected by the violence received counseling services. Schools may start support groups to sensitize and assist the students who were adversely affected directly by the post election violence. The educational managers can be trained on educational leadership so that they can impact the larger society positively.

The violence was as a result of the negative ethnicity which was promoted during the campaigns of 2007. The tribal prejudice whipped up during the 2007 campaigns was a major factor contributing to the post election mayhem. During that period there was charged emotions with negative ethnicity. This was felt especially in the areas where diverse communities lived, towns and schools. Kenyans therefore need to reject leaders who thrive in whipping people's emotions for their selfish end. Civic Education, if carried out effectively will help monitor and control how leaders use authority and power at their disposal and make the citizens to run their affairs from informed positions. There is need to carry our civic education to enable the citizens to vote objectively. Civic education equips the people with the knowledge and capabilities necessary to check against the blind obedience through scrutinizing orders and directives down-loaded to them. This can be successfully incorporated into the primary and secondary schools curriculum.

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