



Original Article

## Influence of Principals' Conflict Management Techniques on Teacher Job Satisfaction in Selected Secondary Schools in Uriri and Nyatike Sub Counties, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

According to a survey by the American Management Association, managers spend 24% of their time managing conflicts. This is a waste of time as a resource, reducing this time wastage would mean improving the quality of management. Conflict is inevitable and a natural phenomenon, the secondary school principals in Uriri and Nyatike sub-counties have not been spared of the challenges of conflict management on teacher job satisfaction. Therefore, the study aimed to determine the principals' conflict management techniques on teacher job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Uriri and Nyatike sub-counties, Kenya. It was guided by Engle & Kane, M. J. (2004) Herzberg's two-factor theory and a conceptual framework used to show the interplay between the principals' conflict management techniques and teacher job satisfaction. The research employed a descriptive survey design to obtain information. The target study population consisted of 1960 teachers, 87 principals in 87 secondary schools in Uriri and Nyatike sub-counties. Stratified simple random sampling was used to obtain a sample of 29 principals and 319 teachers. Data was collected using questionnaires. Face and content validity of the instruments was determined by experts in educational management and policy studies. In order to enhance the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted in 6 secondary schools in the sub-counties, which were excluded from the main study. The reliability was tested using test-retest method and a Pearson's  $r$  coefficient of 0.79 for principals' and 0.83 for teachers' questionnaires obtained. Quantitative data was analysed using frequency count, percentages and mean. The study established that integrating obliging had a strong and positive correlation with teacher job

satisfaction, dominating and avoiding techniques had  $p > 0.05$  which is not statistically significant. The findings add to the existing body of knowledge and may be useful in developing guidelines for principals and other stakeholders to enable them to manage schools effectively. Also, help the Ministry of Education to formulate training materials for school managers to enable them to manage conflicts effectively and to enable teachers and educators to improve and manage conflicts in schools more effectively and efficiently.

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## INTRODUCTION

Conflicts have been witnessed in schools and it is the role of the principal to mitigate their effects so that teachers can have a good working environment and hence, improved job satisfaction. Conflict is an expressed struggle between parties who perceive themselves as having incompatible goals, view resources as being scarce and regard each other as interfering with the achievement of their own goals (Farsheh & Najafi, 2016). According to Farsheh & Najafi (2016), productivity in any organisation is a function of how well employees perform their various tasks which is very much dependent on other factors such as conflict management. Individual performance is a function of the ability or the willingness of the workers to perform the job (Momanyi, 2016). This willingness is highly dependent on job satisfaction.

This research sought to investigate the Principals' conflict management techniques on teacher job satisfaction in selected secondary schools in Uriri and Nyatike sub-counties. If teachers are satisfied with their jobs, they will have positive and favourable attitudes which will make them willing to do extra work, more innovative and more loyal to the school administration in so doing performance of students will be enhanced. According to the American Management Association (2014), managers spend 24% of their time managing conflicts. This sounds like a waste of time while it could be an opportunity if conflicts are dealt with constructively.

Iravo (2011) researched conflict management in organisations as experienced in Kenyan secondary schools. Data was collected in 43 secondary schools in Machakos County. Findings indicated that if conflicts are managed well schools perform better, but did not explore teacher job satisfaction.

This paper presents the findings of the study on the conflict management techniques on teacher job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Uriri and Nyatike Sub-Counties, Kenya. The following objectives guided the study: To determine the conflict management techniques used by principals to deal with conflicts in schools and to establish the relationship between principals' conflict management techniques and teacher job satisfaction in public secondary schools.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a myriad of conflict management techniques that can be used in the context of schools; however, this study focused on integrating technique, obliging technique, dominating technique, avoiding technique and compromising. According to Marsavelski & Braithwaite (2019), integrating technique is when one finds that one is wrong and allows a better position to be heard. Kazimoto (2013) asserts that accommodative leaders are willing to meet the needs of others as well as personal needs. The leader in such case is not assertive. The technique is more efficient when the issue is more important to one party or person in comparison to those involved. Finding the harmony is in most cases more important than a win. For example, in a school, there may be one teacher who has to conduct a practical lesson on weekends but may claim that they need weekends to spend time with their family. Instead of the principal insisting that the teacher must stay in school on both days, the teacher can be asked to take one day to stay with family and conduct practical lessons on the other. Saeed et al., (2014) assert that obliging is also known as placating that is placing high value on others, elevating them and making them feel better. In a school situation, the principals may yield and demands of others to ease tension. The technique is used when the relationship is more important than the issue and cooperation is more important.

Deep concern for self and low concern for others technique has been identified with win-lose orientation or with forcing behaviour to win one's position. The dominating technique relies on the use of the position of power, aggression and verbal dominance. This technique is direct and uncooperative (Mouton & Blake, 2000). If the

principal wants examinations to be administered outside the teaching time, regardless of teachers' views, they overrule and have disciplinary action taken against those teachers who fail to comply. In this case, the principal has the bigger picture in mind; the students would benefit because teaching time will be maximised.

Low concern for self and others technique has been associated with withdrawal, buck-passing, or sidestepping situations. An avoiding principal fails to satisfy their concerns as well as the concerns of the other party. This technique is useful when issues are trivial or when the potential dysfunctional effect of confronting the other party outweighs the benefits of the resolution of the conflict. Avoiding technique is where a manager may tend to evade the conflict entirely to preserve people's feelings and dignity. The controversy may be trivial or impossible to solve (Thomas and Kilmann, 1992). According to Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, the technique is however, weak and ineffective in most scenarios. Avoiding technique can be appropriate when victory is impossible.

Compromising technique is associated with an intermediate level of concern for self and others. Involves the "give and take", when the parties involved have to relinquish some aspects of their demands in order to arrive at a mutually acceptable decision (Kazimoto, 2013). The technique is used when the goals of the conflicting parties are mutually exclusive or when both parties, who are equally powerful have reached an impasse. The technique is appropriate when dealing with particular strategic issues. Rahim & Magner (2011) point out that a compromising technique is reflected in behaviour that is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperation. According to Omweri (2013), compromising is effective in dealing with interpersonal conflict when it benefits both parties.

## Conflict Management and Goal Accomplishment

Conflicts when poorly managed, affect the accomplishment of organisational goals due to their attending stress, hostilities and other undesirable factors. In the school situation, conflicts may hamper effective curriculum delivery and other

programs. The issue of conflict management is paramount for goal accomplishment. Albaker & Rahim (2011) viewed conflict management as a collaborative approach. Their view of conflict conforms to Chitiris (1988) who defined conflict as an interactive process which is manifested through incompatibility, disagreements or differences between persons, groups, organisations or Countries

Principals' conflict management technique is instrumental in teacher job satisfaction. Satisfaction with supervision has received extensive attention in organisational research. Job satisfaction is an important workplace contract and one that is of concern for effective management. Thus, numerous research findings suggest that conflict management technique is related to various aspects of employee satisfaction. Momanyi (2016) argues that conflict resolution has a strong correlation with employee satisfaction. According to Biutha et al., (2013), satisfaction with the principal's supervision in a school study is one of the most important attitudinal issues in the school that principals face. Stanton et al. (2002) in their well-documented measure, the Cornell JDI (Cornell Job Descriptive Index) described five areas of satisfaction: the work itself, the supervision, the co-workers, the pay, and the opportunities for promotion on the job. Since the theme of the present study is on the superior-subordinate relationships, the job-facet satisfaction that is most relevant to our study is the satisfaction with supervision. This paper presents the findings

of the study on the conflict management techniques on teacher job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Uriri and Nyatike Sub-Counties, Kenya.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents that the study sought to establish were; gender, age, highest academic qualification, years of professional experience and years of service in current school as either a teacher or principal. Lindsey (2015) defined gender as the 'socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women' and people of other genders. Thus, men and women in leadership positions are exposed to different expectations in their careers due to the gender role stereotyping applied to male and female behaviour (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2017. *Table 1* presents the gender distribution of principals and teachers in Uriri and Nyatike Sub-Counties, Kenya. Findings showed that that 165 (51.7%) teachers were male and 154(48.3%) were female while 23 (79.3%) principals were male and 6 (20.7%) were female. The distribution revealed that the public secondary schools in Uriri and Nyatike sub-counties had gender representation in the administration and management of the schools. The finding of this study indicates that the male principals were more than female principals.

**Table 1: Gender and Age Distribution of the Respondents**

Respondent	Gender			Age (years)					
	Male	Female	Total	20-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Total	
Teacher	F	165	154	<b>319</b>	108	116	70	25	<b>319</b>
	%	51.7	48.3	<b>100.0</b>	33.9	36.4	21.9	7.8	<b>100.0</b>
Principal	F	23	6	<b>29</b>	0	6	15	8	<b>29</b>
	%	79.3	20.7	<b>100.0</b>	0.0	20.7	51.7	27.6	<b>100.0</b>

From *Table 1* above, it can be observed that the highest number of teachers in study 116 (36.4%) were aged between 31-40 years, followed by 108 (33.9%) in the age group of between 20-30 years, 70 (21.9%) between 41-50 years and 25 (7.8%) in the age group of between 51-60 years. On the other hand, the highest number of principals in study 15

(51.7%) were in the age group of 41-50 years, followed by 8 (27.6%) in the age group between 51-60 years and 6 (20.7%) between 31-40 years. Old teachers are better experienced in handling conflicts as compared to their younger counterparts (Hakvoort, Larsson & Lundström, 2020). They prefer collaborative conflict management

approaches when resolving disputes in the school, while young generation teachers and principals prefer reactive approaches when resolving conflict especially with students. Study findings reveal that most of the teachers and principals are over 30 years, thus they are better experienced to manage conflicts in schools.

The majority of teachers 180 (56.4%) had Bachelor of Education as the highest academic qualification, followed by 111 (34.8%) with Diploma, 23 (7.2%) with Masters and 5 (1.6%) with PhDs. Similarly, the majority of principals 16 (55.2%) in the study had Bachelor of Education as the highest academic qualification, followed by 8 (27.6%) with Masters and 5 (17.2%) with Diploma. Although, the teachers and principals were not evenly distributed

with regard to categories of education level, the education categories were well represented. The level of education provides efficient knowledge and skills in conflict management styles (Kingangi, 2009).

Table 2 shows that more than half of teachers who participated in the study had less than 11 years in the teaching profession 207 (64.9%) while 23 (79.3%) of the principals had more than 15 years of professional experience in teaching. Bass (2003) studying leadership, psychology and organisational behaviour in New York submitted that principals with longer teaching experience perform better than their colleagues when it comes to resolving conflicts within the school.

**Table 2: Distribution of Respondents' Experience and Time of Services in Current School**

Respondent		Years of working experience				Total	Years of service in the current school				Total
		1-5	6-10	11-15	≥16		0-2	3-4	5-7	≥8	
Teacher	F	125	82	47	65	<b>319</b>	115	88	64	52	<b>319</b>
	%	39.2	25.7	14.7	20.4	<b>100.0</b>	36.1	27.6	20.1	16.3	<b>100.0</b>
Principal	F	0	4	2	23	<b>29</b>	11	16	2	0	<b>29</b>
	%	0.0	13.8	6.9	79.3	<b>100.0</b>	37.9	55.2	6.9	0.0	<b>100.0</b>

With regard to years of service in their current school, Table 2 indicates that the majority of teachers 115 (36.1%) had served less than 3 years, followed by 88 (27.6%) with 3-4 years, 64 (20.1%) between 5-7 years and 52 (16.3%) with more than 7 years. However, the majority of the principals 16 (55.2%) had 3-4 years, followed by 11 (37.9%) with less than three years and 2 (6.9%) with 5-7 years of service in their current schools. From the findings in table 2 above, majority of the teachers had served in their current schools for over five years. This indicates their adequacy of knowledge on conflicts prevalent in their schools. They are therefore better informed on how to handle conflicts in their schools. According to Kingangi (2009), teachers with more years of service are well familiarised with prevalent institutional conflicts and have developed techniques of handling such conflicts. Principals with long service duration in an institution make better decisions of conflicts in the school involving both staff and students.

**Principals Conflict Management Techniques**

The research question responded to was: What are the conflict management techniques used by the principals in the public secondary school? The responses to this research question by teachers and principals in public secondary schools are presented in Tables 3 & 4 which gives the frequency and mean levels.

**Integrating Technique**

The technique is also known as the collaborating style or problem- solving style. It refers to a situation in which the parties to conflict each desire to satisfy the concerns of all parties fully. Thus, it involves great concern for self and others. People using this technique attend to the issue openly, frankly and neutrally by communicating with the other party (Flanagan and Runde, 2008).

**Table 3: Integrating Technique**

Statement	RES	AL	OF	ST	RA	NR	MR
My principal allows us to be heard when involved in conflict	<b>T</b>	143	113	57	4	2	<b>4.23</b>
	<b>P</b>	17	8	4	0	0	<b>4.45</b>
My principal is willing to meet our needs in relation to the improvement of the work environment	<b>T</b>	137	113	58	11	0	<b>4.18</b>
	<b>P</b>	13	14	2	0	0	<b>4.38</b>
My principal views cooperation on conflict management as effective because it enhances job satisfaction	<b>T</b>	142	116	47	12	2	<b>4.20</b>
	<b>P</b>	19	9	1	0	0	<b>4.62</b>
My principal uses conflict management technique that ensures harmony is created	<b>T</b>	138	105	50	20	6	<b>4.09</b>
	<b>P</b>	16	13	0	0	0	<b>4.55</b>
My principal encourages exchange of information during conflict management	<b>T</b>	137	103	62	13	4	<b>4.12</b>
	<b>P</b>	11	15	3	0	0	<b>4.28</b>
My principal aims at mediating solutions that enhance feelings of being valued by the institution	<b>T</b>	130	101	61	21	6	<b>4.03</b>
	<b>P</b>	11	14	4	0	0	<b>4.24</b>
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>T</b>	827	651	335	81	20	<b>4.23</b>
	<b>P</b>	87	73	14	0	0	<b>4.52</b>

**RES**= Respondent **AL**= Always **OF**= Often **ST**= Sometimes **RA**= Rarely **NR**= Never **T**= Teachers **P**= Principals **MR**= Mean Rating

Table 3 shows that 143(44.8%) teachers indicate that the principals often allowed their staff to be heard whenever involved in the conflict at a mean of 4.23. On the other hand, 17 (58.6%) principals acknowledged that they always allowed their staff to be heard whenever involved in the conflict with a mean of 4.45. By allowing the teachers to express themselves, the principals manifest the intent to understand the problem and the feelings underlying what the teachers say. This finding agrees with the findings of Marsavelski & Braithwaite (2019) who contend that integrating technique is suitable in conflict management as it ensures that even if someone is wrong, they are given an opportunity to be heard.

Secondly, Table 4 indicates that 137 (42.9%) teachers and 14 (48.3%) principals confirmed that the principals were often willing to meet the needs of the staff in relation to the improvement of the work environment at a mean of 4.18 and 4.38 respectively. According to human needs theory, conflicts occur when certain individuals or groups do not see any other way to meet their need, or when they need understanding, respect and consideration for their needs (Fisher, 1990). Therefore, the principals' willingness to meet the needs of the staff implies their readiness to cooperate in satisfying the desires of others.

**Table 4: Obliging Technique**

Statement	RES	AL	OF	ST	RA	NR	MR
My principal ensures management of conflict satisfies everyone whenever possible	T	116	107	81	9	6	<b>4.00</b>
	P	21	4	4	0	0	<b>4.59</b>
Teachers manage conflicts by giving up some of their demands to help the principal make suitable decisions	T	62	124	100	29	4	<b>3.66</b>
	P	17	6	5	1	0	<b>4.34</b>
My principal puts aside his/her demands during conflict management process	T	65	109	93	31	21	<b>3.52</b>
	P	9	13	2	5	0	<b>3.90</b>
My principal's conflict management techniques ensure harmony and cooperation between parties involved	T	137	90	64	26	2	<b>4.05</b>
	P	13	10	6	0	0	<b>4.24</b>
My principal tries to meet the needs of those involved in conflict whenever possible	T	99	123	70	25	2	<b>3.92</b>
	P	18	9	2	0	0	<b>4.55</b>
My principal accommodates views of all teachers involved in conflict	T	152	82	59	22	4	<b>4.12</b>
	P	8	11	9	1	0	<b>3.90</b>
<b>Overall Mean</b>	T	631	635	467	142	39	<b>4.00</b>
	P	86	53	28	7	0	<b>4.52</b>

### Obliging Strategy

The technique refers to the willingness of one party in a conflict to place the opponent's interest above their own. It expresses low assertiveness for self-satisfaction and high cooperation for the satisfaction of others' desires. *Table 4*, shows the responses of teachers and principals on the use of the obliging technique. It indicates that 116 (36.4%) teachers acknowledged that the principals often ensured management of conflict satisfies everyone whenever possible at a mean of 4.00.

Similarly, 21 (72.4%) principals indicated that they always ensured management of conflict satisfies everyone whenever possible at a mean of 4.59. This finding indicates that the principals care about the desires of teachers by downplaying their own, presenting that principals have low anxiety for self and high anxiety for others. Rahim (1992) argued that most organisations use obliging strategy if they want to be harmonious and create goodwill and ensure that performance is not affected by conflicts thus maintaining good employee and management relationship.

Secondly, 124 (38.9%) teachers often acknowledged giving up some of their demands to help the principals make a suitable decision at a mean of 3.66 (see *Table 4*). Yet, 17 (58.6%) principals acknowledged that teachers always gave up some of their demands to facilitate decision making with a mean of 4.34. The finding showed similarities with Gordon (2003) noting that dwelling on the differences affects employee performance negatively as it causes disagreement, but residing on the similarities ensures peace and improved employee performance, this means that this strategy tends to give in to the other's demands while giving up one's own needs and interests.

### Dominating Strategy

The strategy refers to a desire to satisfy one's interest, regardless of the impact on the other party to the conflict. It is regarded as assertive and not co-operating. Here you work to achieve your goals at all costs, even if it means sacrificing relationship and may involve the use of coerciveness and other forms of power to dominate other people or groups in order to pressurise them in accepting your view

of the situation. It involves being non-co-operative but assertive, working against the wishes of the other party and engaging in a win-lose competition and/ or forcing through the exercise of authority

(Kalm & Johansson, 2016). Balay (2006) asserts that competitors are people who have low concern for their own needs. They always want to impose their will and are low in co-operation.

**Table 5: Relationship between Principals' Conflict Management Techniques and Teacher Job Satisfaction**

		Integrating	Obliging	Dominating	Avoiding	Job satisfaction
<b>Integrating</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.752*	-.001	.007	.692*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.980	.906	.000
<b>Obliging</b>	Pearson Correlation	.752*	1	.074	.041	.663*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.188	.468	.000
<b>Dominating</b>	Pearson Correlation	-.001	.074	1	.316*	.092
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.980	.188		.000	.101
<b>Avoiding</b>	Pearson Correlation	.007	.041	.316*	1	.015
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.906	.468	.000		.784
<b>Job satisfaction</b>	Pearson Correlation	.692*	.663*	.092	.015	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.101	.784	

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). a. Listwise N=319

Table 5 shows that the relationship between integrating technique and teacher job satisfaction was positively strong and significant ( $r = .692$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Similarly, the correlation between obliging technique and teacher job satisfaction had a strong and positive significant relationship ( $r = .663$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, dominating and avoiding techniques had a very weak and positive relationship with teacher job satisfaction. The relationship was not statistically significant; For instance, dominating technique and teacher job satisfaction had ( $r = .092$ ,  $p > .05$ ) while avoiding technique and teacher job satisfaction had ( $r = .015$ ,  $p > .784$ ).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings show that integrating technique had the greatest influence on teacher job satisfaction, followed by obliging and dominating, while avoiding technique had the least influence on

teacher job satisfaction. However, the influence of dominating and avoiding techniques was not statistically significant, ( $p > .05$ ). Integrating and obliging had a statistically significant relationship with teacher job satisfaction.

The Teachers Service Commission and the Ministry of Education should have formal guidelines on conflict management techniques apart from seminars and workshops that they hold for school administrators.

School administrators should only use obliging, integrating and compromising conflict management techniques. However, where the issue is more important than the relationship, they can use dominating and where the relationship is more important than the issue, they should use avoiding techniques of conflict management.

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