

Influence Of Conflict Resolution On Students' Academic Performance In Public Secondary Schools In Tana River County, Kenya.

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of deputy principals' conflict resolution roles on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Tana River County, Kenya. Conflict resolution is an essential dimension of school leadership, directly shaping school climate, teacher morale, and student learning outcomes. Guided by the Transformational Leadership Theory and the Theory of Academic Performance, the study employed a descriptive survey design targeting 296 respondents from 34 public secondary schools. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, and 284 valid responses were analyzed, yielding a 96% response rate. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied using SPSS version 29. Reliability analysis indicated that the research instruments were internally consistent (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$). Findings revealed that conflict resolution had a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation with students' academic performance ($r = 0.695, p < 0.05$). Regression results confirmed that conflict resolution was a significant predictor of academic outcomes ($\beta = 0.141, p = 0.001$), contributing meaningfully to the overall model ($R^2 = 0.624$). The study concludes that deputy principals' ability to manage disputes effectively enhances harmonious relationships, reduces disruptions, and creates a learning environment conducive to academic excellence. It recommends capacity-building programs for school administrators in mediation, restorative justice, and communication skills. Policy interventions should prioritize professional development frameworks and allocate adequate resources to support conflict resolution practices in schools.

Key Words: *Conflict resolution, Deputy principals, Academic performance, School discipline, Tana River County.*

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I. Introduction

Academic performance remains a central benchmark of educational success and a vital determinant of students' future opportunities. In Kenya, secondary education plays a pivotal role in preparing learners for higher education and participation in national development. However, persistent disparities in performance, especially in regions such as Tana River County, have raised concerns among education stakeholders. Studies have shown that beyond cognitive and instructional factors, school discipline and conflict management significantly shape the learning environment and influence academic outcomes (Mutsoli & Kikechi, 2024; Jeptoo & Edabu, 2022).

Deputy principals in Kenyan secondary schools are charged with the responsibility of enforcing discipline, maintaining order, and resolving conflicts among students, teachers, and, at times, parents. Their role in conflict resolution is particularly crucial, as unresolved disputes often escalate into indiscipline, absenteeism, or unrest, which negatively impacts academic achievement. According to Coleman et al. (2021), effective conflict resolution fosters emotional intelligence, enhances communication, and restores relationships, thereby creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning. Conversely, failure to address conflicts undermines school stability, leading to disruptions that compromise student performance.

In Tana River County, persistent challenges such as inadequate school infrastructure, teacher shortages, and socioeconomic barriers have compounded the problem of low academic achievement. The Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) mean scores in the county have consistently remained below the national average, with grades fluctuating between D and C- in recent years (County Education Board Report, 2022). These outcomes are often linked to recurrent cases of student unrest, truancy, and indiscipline, highlighting the centrality of effective conflict resolution mechanisms in sustaining academic progress.

Despite the deputy principals' pivotal role, limited empirical research has examined the direct relationship between their conflict resolution practices and students' academic performance in this region. This

study therefore sought to address this gap by investigating how conflict resolution undertaken by deputy principals influences the academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Tana River County.

Objective of the Study

To evaluate the influence of conflict resolution on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Tana River County, Kenya.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are valuable to multiple stakeholders. For deputy principals and other school administrators, the results provide evidence-based insights into the effectiveness of conflict resolution practices in enhancing academic outcomes. Teachers benefit from a more stable learning environment, enabling them to concentrate on instructional delivery. Students gain from reduced disruptions and improved interpersonal relationships that support learning. At the policy level, the study contributes to education management discourse by offering recommendations on professional development programs for school leaders. For scholars, it enriches literature on school leadership, discipline, and performance, providing a foundation for comparative research in other contexts.

II. Literature Review

Conflict resolution in schools has emerged as a critical determinant of educational quality and student performance. While academic performance is influenced by diverse factors such as teacher quality, socioeconomic conditions, and infrastructure (Atchia & Chinapah, 2023), discipline and harmonious school environments remain equally central. In the Kenyan context, deputy principals are entrusted with enforcing discipline and often serve as primary mediators in disputes among students, teachers, and occasionally parents (Nyakan, 2021).

Effective conflict resolution fosters an atmosphere of trust, safety, and respect, which directly enhances students' concentration and engagement in learning. Coleman et al. (2021) emphasize that when conflicts are addressed constructively, schools witness reduced incidences of bullying and violence, and students demonstrate improved emotional regulation and academic focus. Conversely, unresolved disputes create tension, absenteeism, and unrest, which undermine academic performance (Moshi, 2022).

Kenyan secondary schools have long struggled with cases of indiscipline, ranging from strikes to drug abuse, with many incidents linked to poor communication and ineffective conflict management (Ajowi & Omboto, 2013). The outlawing of corporal punishment in 2001 necessitated alternative strategies for managing student behavior, with deputy principals expected to lead in mediation, dialogue, and counseling (MOEST, 2001). Studies by Jeptoo and Edabu (2022) show that schools that integrate guidance and counseling with structured conflict resolution practices record fewer cases of unrest and better academic performance compared to those relying solely on punitive measures.

Regional studies provide further evidence of the impact of conflict management on educational outcomes. Macharia (2024) observed that public secondary schools in Nairobi County that employed mediation and restorative approaches not only reduced the recurrence of disputes but also posted higher KCSE mean scores. Similarly, Makola et al. (2022) reported that deputy principals who embraced participatory conflict resolution strategies in Western Kenya created supportive learning climates that positively influenced student motivation and performance.

From a policy perspective, the Kenya Education Sector Report (2022) underscores that leadership in discipline and conflict resolution is a cornerstone for achieving national education goals under the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). Schools in marginalized regions such as Tana River face additional socioeconomic and infrastructural challenges, amplifying the need for effective leadership in conflict resolution to sustain academic achievement.

Overall, the reviewed studies highlight that conflict resolution is not merely an administrative function but a leadership practice that shapes the academic trajectories of learners. However, limited research has directly examined the specific influence of deputy principals' conflict resolution roles on academic outcomes in counties such as Tana River, thus justifying the current study.

III. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the influence of deputy principals' conflict resolution practices on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Tana River County, Kenya. The target population comprised 296 respondents drawn from 34 schools, including deputy principals and form four students. Using census sampling, all deputy principals and principals were included in the study to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Data were collected through structured questionnaires consisting of both closed- and Likert-scale items. Instrument validity was ensured through expert review and piloting, while internal consistency was confirmed

using Cronbach's alpha. Reliability coefficients exceeded the recommended 0.70 threshold (George & Mallery, 2003), demonstrating that the instrument was dependable.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 29. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) summarized responses, while inferential statistics including Pearson's correlation and multiple linear regression were applied to establish relationships between conflict resolution practices and academic performance. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed.

Response rate

A total of 296 questionnaires were administered, out of which 284 were returned duly completed, representing a response rate of 96%. This high response rate enhanced the validity and generalizability of the findings.

Data Reliability Assessment

The researcher sought to assess the reliability of the data collected to measure the various variables in the study. The purpose of reliability assessment was to assess the internal consistency of the data collected by the research questionnaires. To measure this, Cronbach Alpha was computed to assess the reliability of the data collected. According to George and Mallery (2003), Cronbach Alpha value greater than 0.7 is regarded as satisfactory for reliability assessment.

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha for Reliability Assessments

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha Values
Conflict Resolution	6	0.782
Academic performance	5	0.799

Respondents' characteristics

The study analyzed responses from 284 participants. Male respondents accounted for 61% (n = 173), while female respondents represented 39% (n = 111). In terms of professional experience, 28% (n = 79) had less than 5 years of administrative service, 46% (n = 131) had between 6–10 years, and 26% (n = 74) had more than 10 years. These demographics indicate that the majority of the respondents had considerable experience in school administration, making their views on conflict resolution credible and well-informed.

Influence of conflict resolution on academic performance.

Deputy principals' responses on conflict resolution practices revealed generally high agreement levels across the items measured. As shown in Table 2, mean scores ranged between 3.89 and 4.12 on a five-point Likert scale, indicating that most deputy principals perceived conflict resolution as central to their disciplinary role. The overall mean score of 3.98 suggests that conflict resolution is moderately to strongly practiced in the schools studied.

Table 2. Influence of conflict resolution on academic performance

Conflict Resolution Items	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
This school addresses conflicts promptly and fairly	284	4.12	0.86
Mediation is preferred over punitive measures	284	3.97	0.91
Students are involved in resolving disputes	284	3.89	0.94
Teachers and parents are engaged in conflict resolution	284	4.05	0.83
Conflict resolution reduces recurrence of indiscipline	284	3.96	0.92
Conflict resolution fosters better learning environment	284	3.98	0.88
Overall Mean	284	3.98	0.89

The high mean scores show that deputy principals actively use conflict resolution as part of their leadership responsibilities. Practices such as prompt intervention, mediation, and involvement of multiple stakeholders (students, teachers, and parents) are common. These practices suggest that conflict resolution is embedded in school management and contributes to creating a more conducive learning environment.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between conflict resolution and students' academic performance. Results in **Table 3** indicate a strong positive and statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.695$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Correlation between Conflict Resolution and Academic Performance

Variables	Academic Performance	Conflict Resolution
Academic Performance	1.000	.695**
Conflict Resolution	.695**	1.000

The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.695$) indicates a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between conflict resolution and academic performance. This suggests that schools where deputy principals employ effective conflict resolution practices tend to record higher levels of student achievement. Conversely, weak or inconsistent conflict resolution may contribute to poor performance through increased disruptions and indiscipline.

Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression was conducted to determine the predictive power of conflict resolution on academic performance within the broader disciplinary model. Results in **Table 4** show that conflict resolution significantly predicted academic performance ($\beta = 0.141$, $p = 0.001$).

Table 4. Regression Results for Conflict Resolution and Academic Performance

Predictor	Unstandardized β	Std. Error	Standardized β	t-value	Sig.
(Constant)	1.128	0.243	—	4.644	0.000
Conflict Resolution	0.141	0.043	0.141	3.279	0.001

Model Fit: $R = 0.790$; $R^2 = 0.624$; $F = 100.185$; $p < 0.001$

The regression analysis confirms that conflict resolution is a statistically significant predictor of academic performance. With a standardized beta ($\beta = 0.141$), conflict resolution makes a meaningful contribution to explaining academic outcomes within the overall disciplinary framework. The model's R^2 value of 0.624 indicates that disciplinary roles including conflict resolution, maintaining order, and enforcing rules collectively explain 62.4% of the variance in student performance. This underscores the practical importance of conflict resolution as a leadership function that shapes academic success.

IV. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that conflict resolution significantly influences students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Tana River County. The strong positive correlation ($r = 0.695$, $p < 0.05$) and regression results ($\beta = 0.141$, $p = 0.001$) confirm that schools where deputy principals employ proactive and participatory approaches to resolving disputes record higher academic outcomes.

From a theoretical perspective, these results align with the Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasizes the leader's role in inspiring trust, fostering collaboration, and creating a supportive climate for learning (Bass, 1999). Effective conflict resolution reflects transformational leadership practices, as deputy principals who mediate disputes fairly and involve stakeholders enhance the relational climate that supports both academic and social development. Similarly, the findings reinforce the Theory of Academic Performance, which posits that learning outcomes are shaped not only by instructional inputs but also by school climate and non-cognitive factors such as discipline and interpersonal relationships (Busalim et al., 2019).

From a policy and practice perspective, the results highlight the centrality of conflict resolution in promoting educational success. Schools in Tana River and similar contexts face challenges of indiscipline, truancy, and unrest, which undermine academic progress. By adopting mediation, restorative dialogue, and stakeholder involvement, deputy principals reduce the recurrence of disruptive behavior and foster stability, thereby enabling students to focus on learning. This resonates with studies by Jeptoo and Edabu (2022), which found that integrating counseling and conflict resolution reduces school unrest and improves student performance.

Moreover, the regression findings show that while conflict resolution is not the sole determinant of academic performance, it makes a measurable contribution within the broader disciplinary framework. This underscores the need for capacity building among deputy principals, equipping them with professional skills in negotiation, mediation, and restorative justice. At the policy level, the Ministry of Education should institutionalize structured conflict resolution programs and provide resources to support their implementation, particularly in marginalized counties where educational outcomes remain below national averages.

Overall, the study extends existing literature by providing empirical evidence from Tana River County, showing that deputy principals' conflict resolution practices are not just administrative duties but strategic leadership functions that directly impact academic outcomes.

V. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the influence of deputy principals' conflict resolution roles on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Tana River County, Kenya. The results demonstrate that conflict resolution has a strong and statistically significant relationship with academic performance, confirming its importance as a leadership function in school management. Deputy principals who employ mediation, restorative dialogue, and stakeholder involvement foster a stable learning environment that minimizes disruptions, enhances student engagement, and contributes to improved academic outcomes. The findings affirm that conflict resolution is not only an administrative responsibility but also a strategic leadership practice with direct implications for educational success.

Recommendations

- i. **Capacity Building for Deputy Principals:** The Ministry of Education, Teachers Service Commission (TSC), and other stakeholders should design continuous professional development programs focusing on mediation, negotiation, and restorative conflict resolution strategies.
- ii. **Institutionalization of Conflict Resolution Frameworks:** Schools should establish structured frameworks for conflict management that prioritize fairness, inclusivity, and dialogue, ensuring that conflicts are resolved promptly and constructively.
- iii. **Integration of Guidance and Counseling:** Deputy principals should integrate conflict resolution practices with counseling services to address underlying causes of disputes such as stress, peer pressure, or socioeconomic challenges.
- iv. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Parents, teachers, and students should be actively involved in school conflict resolution processes to foster transparency, trust, and shared responsibility in maintaining discipline and promoting academic excellence.
- v. **Policy Support:** Education policymakers should strengthen policies that empower deputy principals with adequate resources and autonomy to lead effective conflict resolution programs, particularly in marginalized counties with chronic academic performance challenges.

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