Utilization Of Effective Communication To Create Conflict-Free Teaching And Learning Environment At School

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to investigate use of effective communication to create conflict-free teaching and learning environment. Most studies done, have blamed unhealthy relationships and conflict in schools on poor communication. Communication is the life blood, the righteous vein that conveys directions with distinction in schools. Kenyan government has communication policies ensuring quality education, but schools are still plagued with conflict. Communication strategies like consultation and negotiation have always been suggested as the panacea for the incessant conflict as teachers inform and engage students on school goals. The study answers the question: How can effective communication be utilized to create conflict-free teaching and learning environment at school? Qualitative approach, case study design and multiple case study method were used with purposive sampling of twelve teachers and twelve students from six national schools in three North Rift Counties of Kenya. Interviews, observation and document review generated data. Empathic listening theory was incorporated in thematic data analysis, which involved: transcription, coding and final report writing. Findings reveal that teachers are the school spokespersons in conflict management yet they lack training to handle communication during crises. Frequent teacher-student interaction and feedback lacks in most schools creating a tension-filled learning environment. In conclusion, teachers should be empathic listeners as students are taught to be assertive speakers for effective school communication. It is recommended that teachers should involve students in decision making by listening to their suggestions as this will make them feel satisfied leading to achievement of the set school goals and objectives. Frequent and free communication between teachers and students should be encouraged through the former listening empathically to understand the concerns raised by the latter so as to create conducive teaching and learning environment.
Key Words: *Effective Communication, conflict, conflict-free, teaching and learning environment*

I.   Introduction
The school as a microcosm of society brings together different world views, ways of being, thinking and living, thus becoming a space for representing social differences where different conflicts occur daily. Dealing with the conflicts requires learning and that is why teachers need training in conflict management so that they can correctly manage conflicts and educate students also on managing them (Armstrong, 2018).

The conflict presents formative possibilities, since the perception of the differences existing between people or groups and their needs, values, ideas and different ways of living are essential to a democratic society. In this sense, it is important to enhance positive conflict characteristics and reduce the negative ones. So, the difficulty in managing conflicts is largely due to the difficulties existing between those involved in the conflict to be able to communicate effectively. Therefore, the constructive and educational potential of conflicts depends largely on the skills of those involved. Thus, knowing how to communicate, respecting the rights of others and existing differences are essential for conflicts to revert to social and human development benefits (Bwiruka 2019)

It should also be noted that although family-school relationships are extremely important for students' learning and development, family participation in school is not always satisfactory. So, the family and the school must go together to contribute to the conflict becoming part of a process of growth, acceptance of the other and accountability. Learning to deal with school conflicts positively is essential for the development of healthy relationships (Komives, 2017). This will definitely create a healthy teaching and learning environment.

Statement of the Problem

Effective communication maintains healthy teacher-student relationships and most studies done have blamed conflict in schools on poor communication. Schools being organizations, effective communication is the life blood, the righteous vein that conveys directions with distinction. Griffin (2017) says poor communication is a major source of student turbulence (conflict) and most studies done have shifted this blame on teachers. According to the new Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya, students' verbal communication abilities are evaluated through oral examinations. Teachers teach students, good decision-making skills, listening to one another and selecting the appropriate communication strategy at the right time.

The critical teaching skills and life-long learning competencies of professional teachers are being well-spoken and having good communication skills. In addition, teachers communicate with the home and community for the benefit of students while also being knowledgeable about the teaching content (TSC Teachers' Image Magazine, Sep - Dec 2019). Communication has always been suggested as the panacea to school conflict as teachers develop, facilitate decisions and deliver messages that inform, engage and unite students behind common school goals. Teachers are usually instructed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to use dialogue or communication to resolve the raised students' issues. However, from research there is scanty record or media report indicating that communication has always been used successfully by teachers in addressing students' grievances. This paper investigates how communication can be used effectively to create conducive teaching and learning environment at school.

The Kenyan government has set up policies to ensure quality education, but learning institutions are still plagued with teacher-student conflict. Ministry of Education guidelines on Junior Secondary Education (JSE) 2023, Chapter 3, states that a robust communication strategy shall be developed and operationalized. Chapter 8 adds that a culture of open communication should be encouraged, to allow learners voice their opinions on matters that affect them, without resorting to violence. Teachers shall establish a communication structure, designate area for suggestion boxes and a mechanism for student barazas (informal gatherings).

During the 46th Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB) / Kenya Secondary Schools' Heads Association (KESSHA) Annual National Conference 2023 in Mombasa Kenya themed 'enhancing effectiveness and efficiency of education in Kenya,' the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Dr Belio Kipsang said that teachers must engage learners through communication. He added that teachers have to communicate well, clearly and be good listeners. This is to enhance both teachers' and students' understanding of each other's messages. At school principals' meeting in Nakuru in 2021, the County Executive Committee Member for Education said that communication between teachers and students had broken down resulting to student indiscipline (conflict) especially arson cases.

In Kenya 2021, the Ministry of Education (MoE) issued guidelines on managing conflict in basic learning institutions which included: maintaining open communication channels with the students through frequent discussion forums where student suggestion boxes issues are addressed. Despite these policies, school teacher-student conflicts still exist and communication is cited as the viable solution.

Contextually, the school system allows for representatives in communication like the Students' Governing Councils (SGCs) which facilitate students' views to teachers. The six national schools targeted in this study, like the rest in Kenya have adequate human and financial resources, the best physical infrastructure, admit academically top performing students nationally and are assumed to have excellent communication approaches in conflict management and handling emerging issues. However, there exist communication challenges that need to be explored for effective school operation. The communication challenges have made students to resort to violence resulting to property destruction and in extreme cases loss of lives. Against this backdrop, this paper investigates use of effective communication to create conflict-free teaching and learning environment in six national high schools in three North Rift Counties of Kenya.

Research Question

How can effective communication be utilized to create conflict-free teaching and learning environment at school?

Theoretical Framework

This is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study. The theoretical framework encompasses the theory and narrative explanation about how the theory and its underlying assumptions or tenets are used to investigate the research problem.

Empathic Listening Theory

This theory stresses on the importance of listening in the communication process. According to Craig (1999), the words and deeds of the information's provider and receiver are significant. Craig's position was supported by empathic listening, often known as listening to understand. Parylo and Zepeda (2014) add to

Craig's argument by stating that effective communication requires abilities in focus, reflection and encouragement. The authors claim that a number of leaders (chief principals) employ the top-down communication paradigm, in which information is transmitted from teachers to students, with little thought given to how it would influence them. According to the findings of both writers, communication is most effective when recipients are given the chance to respond to the information delivered. In his 2007 critique of empathic listening, Lasswell argued that the goal of communication should determine whether or not feedback is required.

Empathic Listening Theory Tenet
The importance of listening to understand in the process of communication is stressed here. One of the approaches of conflict management between teachers and students is for both to listen and understand issues in any conflicting situation. This tenet is applicable to this study on conflict management approaches applied by teachers in national high schools.

II. Review Of Related Literature
Williams (2017) investigated ways to manage conflicts in non-governmental schools in Nigeria's Benue State. Among other things, he recommended that parties choose a conflict management procedure, encourage cooperation, take into account the opinions of teachers and students, and consult the public complaint commission and school disciplinary committee. Numerous factors, including poor food, poor communication, poor school administration, a lack of resources, and disruptive students, contributed to conflicts. Unchecked confrontations were said to cause hostility among the school community, teacher turnover, a poor impact on student performance, property damage, early school closures, a bad reputation for the school and the fulfillment of specific demands.

According to Jonkman's (2006) study, principals at Soshanguve Secondary School in South Africa handled conflicts in a variety of ways, including intra-personal, interpersonal, and intra-organizational ones. Poor communication, a lack of resources, rivalry, and disparities in perception all contributed to conflicts. The study also found that most school principals were ineffective at handling conflicts, which made them inevitable in classrooms. The study came to the conclusion that principals create suitable plans and procedures for handling conflicts because they understand that they cannot be avoided.

Ira (2002) looked into the use of conflict resolution in Machakos County Kenyan Secondary Schools. The area was selected due to the highest number of disputes among public schools. The results of the study show that schools function better when the administration is aware of conflict resolution techniques. The study found that conflict could be leveraged to increase cohesiveness and productivity in Kenyan national high schools if chief principals saw it positively. On the other hand, unmanaged conflicts can lead to low effort from school personnel, high absenteeism and turnover, extended disruption activities, and job dissatisfaction (Salleh & Adulpakdee, 2012). It is imperative that principals understand the underlying causes of conflicts and implement appropriate approaches to handle them.

Getting the issues in schools is a challenge for school principals, according to Msila (2011). Msila continued, stating that many school principals are finding it difficult to handle conflict in their institutions due to their overwhelming workloads. In a follow-up study on conflict management and school leadership in South Africa, he found that because conflict leads to stalling, it is not necessary for schools. Additionally, he thought that schools that had advanced through conflict would never prosper because all of the effort was typically focused on handling these disputes. This point of view may encounter a lot of resistance because some researchers contend that while conflicts in schools are inevitable, it is crucial to have a constructive conflict management system in place because if schools do not use these approaches, their performance may suffer. It has been suggested that principals cut back on other activities or assign tasks to teachers in order to better equip them to handle conflicts in schools.

III. Methodology
Case study research design, qualitative approach and multiple case study method were used in this study. The research site was six national high schools in three North Rift Counties of Nandi, Trans-Nzoia and West-Pokot in Kenya. This research site was suitable in that the national high schools in these counties like the rest in Kenya have the best infrastructure, admit academically top performing students nationally and are believed to have excellent communication structures in handling teacher-student conflict. The target population was four hundred and eighty teachers and seven thousand two hundred students of six national high schools in three North Rift Counties of Kenya. Views from twelve teachers and twelve students of national high schools from Nandi, Trans-Nzoia and West-Pokot Counties in Kenya were sought. In addition to the teachers, information from purposively sampled two student leaders from each of the six national high schools was sought.

Purposive sampling was used as the focus was communication approaches used in handling conflict in schools so teachers and students known to have the information needed in the national schools were picked on. To get in-depth explorations of participants who possessed specific information concerning this study, groups were divided into: twelve teachers and twelve student leaders totaling to twenty-four participants.

In this study, semi-structured interviews, observation and document review were used to generate data. Interviews provided extensive exploration of communication approaches used in handling conflict in national high schools in North Rift Counties of Kenya. Views and opinions of the participants concerning communication approaches used in handling conflict in the six national high schools in North Rift Counties of Kenya were sought. Interviews ensured the generation of clear and detailed information as participants had time to clarify and explain information required.

The selected participants in the interviews included twelve teachers and twelve students totaling to twenty-four participants. The responses from the interview were written down and also recorded on a digital voice recorder since it is faster than writing down in a notebook. The notes written were a backup of the recorded information. Personal (face-to-face) interviews were preferred than the telephone (mobile phone) way as it was flexible, more information was generated and the non-response was low. Notices, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, advertisements, letters, memoranda and any other written documents used in the schools communication were purposively sampled. These were the raw documents used in communication in schools which allowed comprehensive exploration of the topic, communication approaches used in conflict management in schools. This also enhanced the credibility of this study as subjectivity assisted in data interpretation basing on personal knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and predispositions. Data generated here was corroborated through interviewing teachers and students in the national high schools. Document review helped explore this topic comprehensively as document hard copies allowed repeated review.

In this research, observation enabled development of rapport and trust which is needed for participants to reveal the 'backstage realities' of their experiences that are generally concealed from outsiders. There was an observation schedule on how teachers and students communicated on a daily basis. Data analysis was through transcription, coding and thematically done.

IV. Presentation And Discussion Of Results

The study established that chief principals used face-to-face conversations between them and the teachers and students. The tone of the voice was informal so that teachers and students are less nervous, and could open up to sharing information. The informal conversation provided opportunities for chief principals to ask quick questions and the teachers and students could share more information and reflection on issues at hand. Teachers and students indicated that it is the easiest way of communicating as well as getting undistorted information and is appropriate for informal communication. In relation to body cues one participant indicated that they preferred personal contact as it broadened the discussion especially if it is a sensitive issue one could observe the non-verbal communication cues too or get immediate feedback most of the time even if one does not get immediate feedback the body language would point to it:

When I entered the chief principal's office, he warmly welcomed me and my discussion with him was punctuated by his nodding and agreement. In the end he told me to go ahead and implement the one hour form four revision timetable. I think she was in a good mood today (Teacher NS3)

The study findings showed that the physical structures of the school were also noted as a major factor to choosing face-to-face communication where some participants showed that offices were far while teachers and students were many and the proximity with the chief principal's office mattered a lot. Further, others indicated that it was a personalized approach that guaranteed a response, whether desired or not and was used in formal sessions for non-major issues, when there are meetings and forums where information is shared. Indeed, other scholars have asserted that face-to-face remained the most powerful human interaction never to replace intimacy and immediacy of people conversing in the same room. This completely underlined the attitude of the participants and the aspect of provision of warmth and emotion that communication gadgets like telephones and computers lacked.

The physical structure of the national high school was also noted as an indicator of choosing face-to-face communication where some participant in national high school three indicated that:

Offices are far people are many so closeness with the chief principal's office is an issue (Teacher NS3)

The study established that the chief principal gave out certificates of recognition for excellent and exemplary performance to teachers and students. The chief principal gave out these certificates to those students who excelled in academic performance like there was the Principal's Academic Award (PAA) or the Principal's Achievement Tea (PAT). The nature and business of the school was also associated with written communication being hardly used. Participants directed that they used written communication:

When giving exam feedback it is the most appropriate and it is not a common practice in the school except for student related information like timetables and schedules (Teacher NS4)

The chief principal wrote emails, letters or memos giving specific suggestions on what ought to be improved on thus helping teachers and students grow and develop; written communication was used in executing their duties. Teachers and the management indicated that they hardly used written communication. This was attributed to factors like cost where there are better, cheaper and easier means of communication. They attributed use of written communication to situations where communication is individualized, where there were confidential documents that needed to be filed, for bulk documents that needed attention and follow up, formal or documented information warranting written approval. The nature and business of the school was also associated with written communication being hardly used. Participants directed that they used written communication when giving internal examination feedback as it was the most appropriate and it was not a common practice in the school except for student related information like timetables and curriculum schedules. In addition, written communication in form of letters was mentioned as being limited to communications mainly from the bursar and the deputy principal administration, which can be like twice a year. Other factors mentioned included conserving the environment and lack of a personal secretary especially for Heads of Departments (HoDs).

Academic staff meetings were found to be the preferred channel used by teachers to air their concerns to the school chief principals. This would mean that teachers avoided private meetings with their chief principals, preferring to air their views during academic staff meetings. This could also mean that the matters raised were not sensitive enough to warrant a private meeting with the concerned chief principal. Few participants said teachers communicated their concerns through grapevine, that some would raise the matter as a rumor in the presence of someone close to the chief principal for the concern to be relayed to him or her.

The study findings established that the national high school administrations occasionally used Short Message Service (SMS) and phone calls. The participants indicated that telephone communication was often used and that phone consultation with fellow teachers was a common occurrence within the school. Other reasons attributed to choosing telephone communication in executing their work included, cases where substantial distance is involved, where the subject matter for discussion is brief such that it warrants a phone call, in terms of time and cost saving, accessibility and availability. Telephone communication choice was also attributed to being used for urgent matters especially when out of the school, when they needed clarification and immediate feedback. Others indicated that they used telephone communication for urgent information when they would not reach someone face-to-face was the easiest way to get immediate feedback.

For urgent information when I can't reach someone face-to-face it is the easiest way to get immediate response. (Teacher NS6)

The findings established that private meetings with the concerned teachers were held to iron out matters. The participants however, agreed that conflict in their schools did lead to poor performance of duties, wastage of time, mistrust and suspicion and it spilled to students leading to poor student performance.

The chief principal used face-to-face conversation between them and the teachers and students. The tone of the voice is informal so that the juniors in the leadership ladder are less nervous and they can be open to sharing. The informal conversation provides opportunities for principals to ask quick questions and the former can share more information and reflection on the subject matter of discussion. Teachers and students indicated that it is the easiest way of communicating as well as getting undistorted information and is appropriate for informal communication. In relation to body cues one participant from national high school two indicated that:

I prefer personal contact as I can broaden the discussion especially if it is a sensitive issue. I can observe the non-verbal communication cues too. I get immediate feedback most of the time even if I do not get immediate feedback the body language points to it. (Teacher NS2)

Communication barrier connected to the speech aspect, namely with problems arising during the transfer of ideas. This barrier can be represented by the following manifestations: indistinct diction, fast or too slow speech and use of junk words.

The communication style of national high school chief principals plays a significant role in motivating both teachers and students to perform their duties effectively. A chief principal who adopts a positive, supportive and clear communication style is more likely to foster a positive national high school environment and increase motivation. Here are some of the communication styles that chief principals can use to contribute to teacher and student motivation thereby creating a conflict-free teaching and learning environment:

Clear communication by chief principals is important to help teachers and students understand their expectations and goals. When chief principals communicate clearly, teachers and students are more likely to feel confident in their tasks and the tasks are more likely to be completed effectively with positive results. Clear

communication also helps to reduce ambiguity and misunderstandings, leading to increased motivation to both teachers and students.

School chief principals who adopt a supportive communication style provide teachers and students with the encouragement and support they need to succeed. Supportive communication can help teachers and students feel valued and appreciated, which leads to a friendly teaching and learning environment.

Chief Principals and teachers who adopt a positive communication style promote a positive school culture. When chief principals use positive language and show enthusiasm for their work, it can create a more conducive working environment.

Those chief principals who adopt a collaborative communication style involve teachers and students in decision-making processes. Collaborative communication can increase motivation by making teachers and students feel that they have a stake in the success of the school. They feel a sense of belonging and more often one will hear them referring to the school as 'our school.'

Chief Principals who adopt a constructive communication style provide feedback that helps teachers and students grow and improve. When chief principals use constructive communication, teachers and students are more likely to learn and develop their skills (Northouse, 2014).

V.   Discussion Of Findings

Frequent teacher-student interaction and feedback lacks in most schools creating a tension-filled learning environment. The study established that majority of the chief principals used authoritarian communication style. Teachers and students believed the chief principals used authoritarian style so that they feel superior and stronger. Some chief principals even resorted to intimidation and psychological violence against their teachers and students which always made them afraid. This was in line with Clark's (2015) assertion that some people view this approach as a form of abuse of power or influence, employing derogatory language, threatening others, and using demeaning language. This approach, which goes by the name of "bossing people around," is abusive and unprofessional rather than authoritarian.

Interviewed teachers reported that it is exceedingly challenging to communicate with a haughty chief principal. Gosnos and Gallo (2013) define an autocratic communication style as one in which educators are controlled with an "iron hand" and do not participate in the decision-making process. All decisions are made without the teachers' consent or input. Also, majority of chief principals are unyielding and frequently decline to provide an explanation for their actions. Chief Principals frequently disobey prior agreements made with teachers. They specify the assignments and methods for teaching and learning, and they do not give a damn about the judgment or initiative of the teachers.

Teachers felt like some chief principals wanted their leadership known and in return treated differently. Those chief principals believed that their ranks were higher. Observation of their gestures and facial expressions, words they used, sometimes made teachers feel like children (demeaned). According to a study conducted by Tuitoek, Yambo, and Adhanja (2015), national high school chief principals who employed this style of communication do not allow for participation in decision-making. This finding was consistent with their findings. They make decisions all by themselves, are task-oriented, strict with teachers and students, love schedules and assume that those who report to them will follow orders without question. These guiding principles are impacted by the scientific management methodology. They subscribe to McGregor's Theory X, which holds that humans are inherently lazy and require intense supervision in order to carry out their duties. Teachers and students in schools that employ this method are unmotivated and exhibit lower levels of engagement in their work making the teaching and learning environment toxic

The study established that democratic communication style when mostly used brought about a positive impact. Most teachers said that their chief principals at first tried to listen to everyone which made them think that all of them were part of school management. The chief principal constantly received suggestions from them. Many decisions emerged as their common decision.

Teachers and students who were given an opportunity to participate in decision-making felt more at home which increased their output and improved their attitude towards their roles at school. Studies on communication philosophies have also demonstrated that democratic communication fosters a friendly work environment, which boosts teachers and students' productivity in curricular and co-curricular activities.

According to Eze (2018), teachers are encouraged to share ideas and opinions, even though the chief principal has the final say in all decisions. Teachers also felt more involved in the process, and creativity was encouraged. These are some of the main traits of democratic communication. Teachers are encouraged to express their opinions, so democratic communication appears to be better at coming up with ideas and more original solutions to conflict issues in national high schools.

Teachers are also more likely to care about the outcome of a project because they feel more invested in it. The study findings showed that warm, sincere behavior was very important as it makes the chief principal to be at peace with him or herself and succeed in effective communication. This goes hand in hand with the study

in Mexico by Maqsood and Bilal (2013) who noted that the leader is the coach who dictates the tune but inputs from the staff are not ignored in decision making. It is a style that is characterized with higher productivity which is sustained for a long period of time. This is because most teachers like the trust they receive and respond with cooperation, team spirit and high morale in a democratic environment.

The results of the study demonstrated that teachers and students wanted a chief principal who would be approachable, courteous and an excellent listener someone with whom they could talk openly or who would take the time to engage with them. This is amply demonstrated by Men's (2010) study, which stated that democratic leaders foster positive teacher perceptions of the national high school as an organization by supporting teachers and students, encouraging them to learn and grow, and developing strong relationships with them.

Conflict between the chief principal, teachers and students was covered in the study as being typical in any other community in society. Debates have focused on the importance of communication in igniting, intensifying and deescalating conflict. However, attempts to resolve conflicts often encounter obstacles in the form of personal attitudes and communication channels.

Researchers looked at how people interacted with one another during a dispute. People like to be treated with respect, which is important if a dispute is to be settled amicably. In order to boost academic staff morale, interactions between national high school chief principals and academic staff members must occur frequently, and it is important that these interactions permit individuals to freely express themselves. The conversation focused on conflict situations, impartiality when listening to all sides with an open mind. The goal of the study was to find out if sending clear messages helped to clear up misconceptions and improve the environment for teaching and learning.

The study found that because they promote in-person interactions between higher management and lower-level staff, the school administration used upward communication during meetings. One-on-one meetings between teachers and the chief principal are among the upward communication, as it could be a gathering of all teachers and school administration to commemorate a significant occasion or discuss significant adjustments.

The results of the study demonstrated that the school administration employed suggestion boxes, in which teachers and students deposited written criticism, grievances, or recommendations for consideration by the national high school administration. Teachers could email their digital comments, grievances, or suggestions to a "suggestion box" email address set up by the school administration. This facilitated open communication between the students, teachers and administration of the school, which improved the environment for teaching and learning.

The prevalence of conflicts in schools, like in many other organizations, has had a negative impact, especially on students' academic performance. According to research, chief principals of national high schools, teachers, and students acknowledge the existence of conflicts and have mechanisms in place to deal with them. However, most school administrators lack an appropriate management strategy to effectively address these conflicts because the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), which employs teachers, have not provided clear procedures on conflict management.

National high school chief principals and teachers are encouraged to experiment with different approaches to reduce or minimize the negative aspects of conflicts because of the complex and multifaceted nature of these events, which occur in a variety of contexts. The findings of this study mandate that teachers and chief principals of national high schools receive conflict management training, and that parties involved in a dispute be included at all times. This would assist in keeping a conflict situation from spiraling out of control, which could impede academic success and school spirit.

In empathic listening theory, effective communication is when recipients (students) are given the opportunity to respond to the information sent (feedback). Communication involves focusing, reflecting and encouraging skills. As per the findings, an effective teacher provides support to students by motivational communication skills in creating conducive learning and teaching environment.

VI.   Conclusion

National high schools have been affected by conflicts just like the rest of the secondary schools in Kenya. This has been manifested in their daily operations both in curricular (academic) and co-curricular performance. From findings, chief principals, teachers and students are very much cognizant of the presence of conflicts and they have some mechanism to deal with these conflicts. Once these conflicts are dealt with, there shall be a friendly teaching and learning environment.

It should be noted that conflicts are a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that occurs in a variety of contexts, chief principals and teachers are encouraged to experiment with different conflict management approaches to reduce or minimize the negative aspects of conflicts. As a result of this study teachers must be trained in conflict management and should always involve all interested parties when managing a conflict.

Providing meaningful professional development and effective communication is essential to promoting a friendly teaching and learning environment in national high schools' administration practices. Teachers should be empathic listeners as students are taught to be assertive speakers. Whenever a student approaches a teacher with an issue, they should take time to listen before offering personal views. Most times students have been dismissed by teachers and their issues labeled petty. These "petty issues" are the ones that develop into major conflicts in school. However, if teachers listened to and provided right responses to the petty issues then major school conflicts could be nipped in the bud. Students on the other hand should be trained to be assertive speakers. An observation has been made that when most students join national high schools at form one, they are assertive speakers but with passage of time they become reserved preferring to share their petty issues with fellow students not teachers. With time the petty issues pile up and become major conflicts that take time to be managed. This creates a tension-filled teaching and learning environment. Let students be assertive in raising their issues through the school suggestion boxes and other communication channels like class meetings and students' barazas or 'kamukunjis' (informal meetings). This would help prevent a conflict situation from becoming unmanageable, which could hinder school progress and unity among school members.

Excellence in education stems from high-quality stakeholder relationships and communication is the key to building these relationships (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Effective communication creates positive school environment wherein teachers can adapt and embrace change. Increased skill in all components of effective communication decreases the fear associated with challenging conversations. Trust is essential to build strong relationships among stakeholders. Clarity of intent increases transparency and active listening supports people to process feedback and implement changes for growth. These essential characteristics build the strong stakeholder relationships necessary for productive schools focused on improvement. Communication will enable the maintenance of relationships while delivering honest assessment, challenging colleagues, engaging in difficult conversations and creating partnerships with families.

VII. Recommendations

Following the analysis of the collected data and the presentation of the summary and findings, the proposed recommendations are presented as below:

1. Conflict management in schools is becoming complex in today's world of science and technology where people are highly informed due to the rapid flow of information, extensions and availability of information in real time. This aspect has eased learning which builds up divergent perspectives in teachers and students in national high schools need to cope with and explore the wide range of mechanisms and proper procedures on how to handle conflicts in their institutions to ensure harmony and a friendly teaching and learning environment. To facilitate this, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in conjunction with Teachers Service Commission (TSC) should ensure that teachers get professional development programs to cultivate their understanding on the best ways to interact with students in managing conflict in schools for the achievement of core school goals and objectives.

2. Teachers should take students as individuals with different backgrounds, interests, perceptions, visions and affiliations. Teachers should involve students in decision making by listening to their suggestions as this will make them feel satisfied leading to a friendly school environment and achievement of the set school goals and objectives. Considering this would help reduce many unnecessary conflicts between them and students.

3. The Guidance and Counseling Departments in schools should be strengthened to educate students on tolerance, teamwork and individual care. This would not only help students but also teachers. Many disciplinary conflicts could be managed in this crucial department through frequent and free communication between teachers and students should be encouraged by the former listening empathically to understand the concerns raised by the latter so as to create conducive teaching and learning environment.

4. Chief Principals should also improve their intellectual stimulation practices to bring about improvement in the management of conflicts in national high schools. This is appropriated by encouraging teachers and students to be more creative and innovative as they undertake their teaching and learning activities. Creative and innovative teachers and students are adequately rewarded to create healthy competition.

5. In a conflict management process, the school conflict management board should consider the utilization of two or more strategies in order to contain conflict amicably. A blend of two or more management strategies in containing conflict will enhance effective conflict management creating a healthy learning and teaching environment.

6. The school management assesses the conflict source or sources before ascertaining the best approach to employ in managing the conflict. It is from the source of conflict where the best approach to employ in managing it shall be identified and hence applied accordingly without use of trial and error.

7. The study also recommends that the school's Boards of Management (BoMs) organize training of its members, teachers and students on an array of conflict management approaches so as to enhance effective

conflict management in national high schools and by far extension all secondary schools as they are under the department of Basic Education and Early Learning within the Ministry of Education.