The Causes of Workplace Conflicts among Teachers' Performance: A Case Study of Government - Aided Secondary Schools in Bukonzo County, Kasese District

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to establish the effects of workplace conflicts on teachers' performance in the government –aided secondary schools in Bukonzo County, Kasese District. It focused on establishing the categories, causes and the effects of workplace conflicts on teachers' performance in the government –aided secondary schools in Bukonzo County Kasese District. A non-experimental descriptive survey design was adopted which used interviews and structured self-administered questionnaires to collect data from a sample of 178 participants. The head teachers, deputy head teachers and directors of studies were sampled using purposive sampling and the teachers were sampled using stratified random sampling. This sample comprised of 11 head teachers, 11 deputy head teachers, 11 directors of studies and 145 teachers. The schools were sampled using census sampling. The causes of workplace conflicts are said to be scarcity of resources, misappropriation of funds and role ambiguities. In light of the above findings, the following recommendations were made; school administration should find out the root causes of workplace conflicts in the government - aided secondary schools and involve all the stakeholders in the school management in order to enhance discipline for effective conflict management strategies to be put in place.
Keywords: Causes, workplace, hazards, conflicts, secondary schools, Uganda

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, quite a number of studies have been undertaken in Asia and the USA all indicating that conflict is a general phenomenon of school life and as a result institutional heads often spend valuable time trying to solve problems that arise as a result of workplace conflicts or disagreement among members. This reduces time for constructive planning and promotion of creative initiatives and solutions. This large part of conflict in workplace disrupts school activities and constructive contribution to the school progress [1]. Schools in Uganda have witnessed an increasing frequency in strikes against school administration either by the students or teachers for the last decade Tumwesige [2]. Some of these strikes have resulted into destruction of property and injuries of school administrators. The strikes have been attributed to undisciplined students or disgruntled teachers Tumwesige [2]. The term conflict carries a variety of definitions, depending on the usage and the context of its usage. Chandan [3] defines conflict as a disagreement between two or more individuals, groups, with each individual or group trying to gain acceptance of its view or objectives over others. He contends that conflict being an outcome of behavior; it is an integral part of human life. In the context of this study, workplace conflicts are conflicts that take place in the workplace and could be between teachers themselves and teachers and school administration. Burns [4] espouses conflict as a disagreement,

misunderstanding, or clash between two or more organizational members or groups arising from the fact that they must share scarce resources or work activities. In secondary schools, because of the scarcity of resources, given that members target different goals, teachers and administration are bound to conflict over allocation of the scarce resources. This consequently affects teachers' performance in terms of executing their duties. The study was done to determine the categories of workplace conflicts in the government-aided secondary schools in Bukonzo County, Kasese District.

METHODOLOGY
Research design

The study used a non-experimental descriptive survey design which is a scientific method used for observing and describing the behavior of a subject without influencing it in any way. This enabled the researcher to obtain information regarding the subjects studied at the time of the study. Kothari (2003) observes that the use of descriptive research design is a process of data collection in order to answer questions concerning the current status of the respondents to be studied. Surveys allow for an anonymous look inside the thought processes of large numbers of people simultaneously, allowing for an opportunity to describe what is not outwardly observable [5]. Moreover descriptive survey describes the characteristics of respondents, phenomena, opinions, attitudes, preferences and perceptions of the persons of interest to the researcher. It was based on a case study of government-aided secondary schools.

Study population

The target population for this study was head teachers, deputy head teachers, directors of studies and the teachers in the eleven government-aided secondary schools in Bukonzo County, Kasese District. The target population was chosen because it would provide adequate and relevant information concerning the study topic. Besides, there have been a number of workplace conflicts reported in the government - aided secondary schools in Bukonzo County Kasese District and no study has been undertaken to establish the categories, causes and effect of workplace conflicts on the teachers' performance.

Sampling techniques

The stratified proportionate random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select the teachers. It was preferred because it involves dividing the population into homogeneous subgroups, thus, males and females and then taking a random sample in each subgroup hence adequate representation of each subgroup. The sample was selected in such a way as to ensure that the male and female teachers in the population are represented in the sample in proportion to the number in the population and they have equal chance to be included. Purposive sampling was used for the head teachers, deputies, the first deputy head teacher in schools with two deputy head teachers and the directors of studies. The head teachers, deputy head teachers and directors of studies were purposively selected because of their positions in the school and they were in a suitable position to provide appropriate information to the study.

Sample size

All the 11 government-aided secondary schools in Bukonzo County, Kasese District were selected by census method. According to Mugenda and Mugenda [6], 30% of the target population will be an ideal sample. By the time of study, the 11 government - aided secondary schools had 403 teachers. Accordingly, 201 would be an ideal sample. Data was collected from 178 respondents, which included 145 teachers, 11 head teachers, and 11 deputy head teachers, and 11 directors of studies.

Research instruments

The instruments used included questionnaires and interview guides which enabled the researcher to solicit for information from the respondents.

Questionnaires

A self-administered questionnaire with closed and open ended questions was designed and used to collect data from the deputy head teachers, directors of studies and the teachers. This is because it helped the researcher to get information from various sources at the same time and it was convenient to the subjects as they filled it at their convenience. It also catered for anonymity from the deputy head teachers, directors of studies and the teachers since they filled it independently.

Interview guide

Leedy [7] defines an interview as a two-person face to face conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research relevant information. The researcher carried out interviews with the head teachers to get in-depth information about the problem of the study which the questionnaires would not elicit. The interview guide constituted of the bio-data section and open ended questions with specific topic areas but the exact wording of the question was left to the interviewer. The face to face interaction helped the researcher to delve deeper into the issues and clarify any doubts that arose. Also it helped the researcher to get intimate feelings and opinions of the head teachers about the study.

Data collection methods

The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods as the study intended to find substantial information or evidence on the categories, causes of workplace conflicts and their effect on the teachers' performance.

Procedure

A covering letter was obtained from the Dean, Faculty of Science, Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) introducing the researcher to the secondary schools' management. Permission from Kasese District Education office was acquired and head teachers of secondary schools were contacted. The questionnaires were given out by the researcher, filled and collected for coding and analyzing. Face to face interviews were conducted for the head teachers in their offices or any other place convenient to them.

Data analysis and presentation

Charles and Mertler [8] affirm that data analysis helps to describe the data clearly; to identify what is typical and atypical among the data; to bring to light differences, relationships and other patterns existent in the data through interpretation; and ultimately to answer research questions and test hypotheses. It is from such analysis that the researcher and other users of the study can make sense of the data. Quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the respondents of the study, was processed and analyzed so as to test the research hypothesis and answer the research questions, and ultimately achieve the study objectives. After manual scrutiny of all the returned questionnaires to ascertain that they were filled, the quantitative data was entered in the computer, using the SPSS packages. Data was then analyzed starting with the primary analysis, which involved use of descriptive statistics, mainly frequencies and percentages where appropriate. Chi-square test was used to determine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. According to Sarantakos [9], Chi-square is a general test, designed to evaluate whether the difference between observed frequencies and expected frequencies under a set of theoretical assumption is statistically significant. Basically, it provides information about whether the collected data are close to the value considered to be typical and generally expected and whether two variables are related to each other. The formula for the Chi-square is:

$$x^2 = \frac{\sum (f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$$

where,

x^2 = Chi – Square

Σ = Sum

f_o = Frequency observed

f_e = Frequency expected

Qualitative data responses from interviews were recorded, typed out directly on computer. At coding stage the respondents' statements were copied verbatim. After coding the data was sorted into categories according to the emerging ideas. This was followed by identification of themes, interconnections or differences, generalizations and analyzed using thematic content analysis, conclusions were then made. Data collected was validated and then coded. Presentation was done using tables for easy communication.

Ethical considerations

The researcher ensured that confidentiality of the information obtained was observed and to be used not for any other purpose other than for the study. The researcher sought for informed consent from the respondents, respected all respondents and did not reveal their identities. They did not put names on the instrument. Clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) was obtained.

RESULTS

Table 1: Teachers' responses about the causes of workplace conflicts

Response	A cause	
	Frequency	Percent
Personality differences	26	18%
Scarcity of resources	28	19%
Perceptions of individuals	20	14%
Misappropriation of funds	24	16%
Goal differences	12	8%
Interdependence	6	4%
Authority relationships	13	9%
Role ambiguities	17	12%
TOTAL	145	100%

From Table 1 above, the majority of the teachers, 28 (19%) of the teachers indicated scarcity of resources as a cause of workplace conflicts, 26 (18%) of the teachers cited personality differences as a cause and 24 (16%) of the teachers pointed out misappropriation of school funds as a cause. These responses points out scarcity of resources, personality differences and misappropriation of funds as the major causes of workplace conflicts in the government-aided secondary schools in Bukonzo County whereas there are other causes as well.

Table 2: Deputy Head teachers' responses about the causes of workplace conflicts

Response	A cause	
	Frequency	Percent
Personality differences	2	18.2%
Scarcity of resources	2	18.2%
Perceptions of individuals	1	9.1%
Misappropriation of funds	1	9.1%
Goal differences	1	9.0%
Interdependence	0	0%
Authority relationships	2	18.2%
Role ambiguities	2	18.2%
TOTAL	11	100%

From Table 2 above, besides interdependence, all the factors used to assess the causes of workplace conflicts, were possible causes. However, the responses points out personality differences, scarcity of resources, role ambiguities and authority differences as the major causes of workplace conflicts in the government-aided secondary schools in Bukonzo County Kasese District studies in view of the deputy head teachers.

Table 3: Directors of studies' responses about the causes of workplace conflicts

Response	A cause	
	Frequency	**Percent**
Personality differences	2	18.2%
Scarcity of resources	2	18.2%
Perceptions of individuals	1	9%
Misappropriation of funds	2	18.2%
Goal differences	0	0%
Interdependence	0	0%
Authority relationships	2	18.2%
Role ambiguities	2	18.2%
TOTAL	**11**	**100%**

From Table 3 above, a part from misappropriation of funds and interdependence, all the aspects used to assess the causes of workplace conflicts were possible causes. Nonetheless, the responses points out scarcity of resources, personality differences and misappropriation of funds as the major causes of workplace conflicts in the government-aided secondary schools in Bukonzo County Kasese District in view of the directors of studies .

DISCUSSION

The second objective of the study was to find out the major causes of workplace conflicts in secondary schools in Bukonzo County Kasese District. The findings revealed different major causes in regard to the different categories of respondents of the study. For instance according to the teachers, the major causes of workplace conflicts were, scarcity of resources, personality differences and misappropriation of funds. The Directors of Studies on the other hand, indicated misappropriation of funds, scarcity of resources and personality differences respectively. While the deputy head teachers pointed out personality differences, role ambiguities and authority relationships.

Moreover, most of the head teachers agreed that workplace conflicts emerge mainly due to scarcity of resources especially financial resources. These discrepancies in the major causes from different categories of the respondents of the study depicts that workplace conflicts are caused by a number of factors, besides it also shows that the different categories of the respondents experience workplace conflict at different levels depending on their respective responsibilities and hierarchy in administration. For example the deputy head teachers identified role ambiguities and authority relationships probably because they are top administrators, the Directors of Studies pointed out misappropriation of funds and scarcity of resources perhaps because their department is so demanding in terms of resources.

Nonetheless, scarcity of resources, personality differences and misappropriation of funds were cross cutting causes. The head teachers mentioned that since their schools are under Universal Secondary Education program where there are no charges apart from lunch fees, it becomes hard to attend to finance related demands fully. Besides, government capitation grant releases are inadequate and are not released on time. The study findings concur with, Kipyego [9], who in his study found out that misappropriation of funds was a major cause of workplace conflicts in secondary

schools. However, Saiti [10], found out that conflict of interest, role ambiguity, incompatible goals, organizational deficiencies and ineffective patterns of communication and information sharing as major causes.

Furthermore, the findings of the study agree with Aldag & Stearns [11], whose study reveals that there are many causes or reasons for conflict in any work setting. They assert that while conflict may take place between members, individuals, and groups, one can easily trace the source of workplace conflicts to one or several of the following events: poor communication, different values, differing interests, scarce resources, and personality clashes which are also what Schlesinger, Eccles & Gabarro [12], have also identified as some of the fundamental causes of workplace conflicts. On the contrary, Okotoni[13], found out unimpressive working conditions of service, non-involvement of students in school administration, administrative incompetence, forceful and compulsory retirement or retrenchment as major causes of workplace conflict. This

discrepancy however could be attributed to the fact that these studies were carried out in distinct environments. In view of the aforementioned explanations, the researcher's position is that workplace conflicts can unfold in a number of ways in a workplace given the interactive nature of members in a workplace, scarce resources, people of different personalities, as well as the different work environments [14-17]. Therefore, one could assert that workplace conflicts may probably depend on the environment of the workplace although there could be crosscutting issues irrespective of the workplace environment. However, despite the fact that the study findings indicate scarcity of resources, personality differences and misappropriation of funds to have been indicated as major causes of workplace conflicts in the secondary schools in Bukonzo County Kasese District, they are not the only causes since they were not rated 100% on the likert scale. Other variables used to assess the causes of workplace conflicts in this study were also rated to a small extent.

CONCLUSION

Workplace conflicts are caused by a number of factors varying from school to school. However, the most experienced causes of workplace conflicts in the government –aided secondary schools in Bukonzo County Kasese District are scarcity of resources, personality differences, and misappropriation of funds, role ambiguities and authority relationship. Therefore there is need for

the headteachers to involve all the stakeholders in the management and planning for the school to enhance information flow among the different stakeholders to improve on the working relations and collaboration so as to control the causes and categories of workplace conflicts in the government –aided secondary schools in Bukonzo County Kasese District.

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