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Educational leadership and social cohesion in conflict-affected communities: A historical study of Molo and Kuresoi, Kenya (1991–2010)

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Abstract

Kenya's Rift Valley region has experienced recurrent episodes of conflict since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s. In Molo and Kuresoi, ethnic tensions, land-related disputes, political competition and displacement disrupted social relations and affected key community institutions, including schools. While previous studies have examined conflict, post-conflict education and educational leadership separately, limited historical scholarship has explored how educational leadership contributed to community cohesion in conflict-affected communities. This article examines the historical relationship between conflict, educational leadership and social cohesion in Molo and Kuresoi between 1991 and 2010. Specifically, it investigates the changing patterns of conflict and their effects on education and analyses how educational leaders responded to conflict-related disruptions while promoting community cohesion. The study adopted a historical research design based exclusively on secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, theses, dissertations, policy documents and institutional reports. Documentary evidence was subjected to external and internal criticism and analysed using thematic and qualitative content analysis, guided by Conflict Transformation Theory and Social Capital Theory. The findings reveal that recurrent conflict disrupted schooling through displacement, school closures, destruction of infrastructure, teacher movement and weakened social relationships. Educational leaders responded through participatory leadership, mediation, peace education, inclusion of conflict-affected learners, teacher support and strengthened school-community engagement. School governance structures further enhanced communication, collaboration and stakeholder participation. The study concludes that educational leadership contributed to social cohesion by fostering trust,

cooperation, inclusion and dialogue, although these efforts were constrained by resource limitations and broader structural challenges. The article recommends strengthening conflict-sensitive educational leadership, school-community partnerships and peacebuilding initiatives in conflict-prone regions.

Key terms: Conflict-affected communities; Educational leadership; Molo and Kuresoi; Rift Valley; Social cohesion.

Introduction

Conflict remained a persistent feature of the social and political history of many African societies. Its consequences extended beyond immediate loss of life and property to affect social relations, livelihoods, migration, access to public services and the functioning of community institutions. Education was particularly vulnerable because schools were embedded within the communities in which conflicts occurred. Where communities experienced displacement, insecurity, destruction of property or prolonged inter-group mistrust, educational institutions experienced interruptions in enrolment, teacher availability, infrastructure, learning and school-community relations. At the same time, schools provided important institutional spaces through which relationships can be reconstructed and social cohesion promoted. Recurrent conflict and displacement disrupted educational pathways through destruction of infrastructure, reduced teacher presence, trauma, declining educational aspirations and diversion of public resources from education (Mousse & Mosisa, 2026). The relationship between conflict and education was therefore multidimensional: conflict disrupted education, while educational institutions and their leadership participated in processes of recovery, inclusion and social cohension.

Molo and Kuresoi provide an important historical context for examining the relationship between conflict, education and social cohesion in Kenya's Rift Valley. Since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s, the areas have experienced recurrent episodes of ethnic and politically related violence, particularly during the 1992, 1997 and 2007–2008 election periods. Their multi-ethnic composition and history of conflict make them suitable sites for investigating how educational leaders responded to conflict-related disruptions and contributed to the promotion of peaceful coexistence within schools and surrounding communities. The study was guided by two objectives: to examine the historical nature and changing patterns of conflict in Molo and Kuresoi between 1991 and 2010, and to analyse the contribution of educational leadership to community cohesion during the same period. The study contributes to scholarship on educational leadership, conflict transformation and social cohesion in Kenya.

Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

To examine the historical nature and changing patterns of conflict in Molo and Kuresoi between 1991 and 2010.

To analyse the contribution of educational leadership to community cohesion in Molo and Kuresoi between 1991 and 2010.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

What were the historical nature and changing patterns of conflict in Molo and Kuresoi between 1991 and

2010?

How did educational leadership contribute to community cohesion in Molo and Kuresoi between 1991 and 2010?

Literature Review

Educational Leadership and Social Cohesion in Conflict-Affected Contexts

Educational leadership plays a critical role in shaping school environments, promoting inclusion, and fostering collaborative relationships among stakeholders. In conflict-affected communities, educational leaders perform responsibilities that extend beyond instructional management to include conflict mediation, psychosocial support, community engagement, and the restoration of trust among diverse groups. Research suggests that schools often serve as important social institutions capable of promoting peaceful coexistence, strengthening community relationships, and supporting recovery processes following episodes of violence and displacement. Educational leaders therefore influence not only educational outcomes but also broader social processes that contribute to cohesion and stability.

Studies conducted in post-conflict and conflict-prone societies demonstrate that school leadership can create inclusive learning environments by encouraging dialogue, participation, and mutual respect among learners and community members. Effective leadership promotes equitable access to educational opportunities, encourages positive school-community relationships, and supports the development of values associated with citizenship, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. Through these processes, schools contribute to rebuilding social capital and strengthening relationships between communities affected by conflict.

Conflict and Education in Kenya’s Rift Valley

Kenya’s Rift Valley has experienced recurrent episodes of ethnic, political, and land-related conflict, particularly during periods associated with electoral competition. Historical studies identify the multiparty election periods of 1992, 1997, and 2007–2008 as significant moments of violence that disrupted social relations and community stability. The conflicts affected livelihoods, population settlement patterns, and access to social services, including education. Schools frequently experienced interruptions resulting from displacement, insecurity, destruction of property, and population movements.

Within Molo and Kuresoi, conflict generated significant educational challenges. Learners and teachers were displaced, school attendance declined, and educational institutions were required to operate under conditions of uncertainty and insecurity. The educational consequences extended beyond physical disruption to include weakened social relationships and reduced trust among community members from different backgrounds. These circumstances increased the importance of school leadership in maintaining learning continuity and promoting community cohesion.

Educational Leadership Responses to Conflict

Educational leaders frequently respond to conflict through initiatives that promote dialogue, participation, reconciliation, and social inclusion. School administrators often collaborate with teachers, parents, religious leaders, government agencies, and community organizations to address emerging tensions and support peaceful relationships. Leadership practices such as participatory decision-making, stakeholder engagement, conflict mediation, and peace education have been associated with improved school-community relations and strengthened social cohesion in diverse educational settings.

Research further indicates that educational leaders contribute to conflict transformation by creating

opportunities for interaction among groups that may otherwise remain divided. Through school activities, governance structures, co-curricular programmes, and community engagement initiatives, schools become spaces where trust can be rebuilt and shared identities cultivated. Such interventions are particularly important in communities recovering from violence where social relationships have been damaged by conflict.

School Governance and Community Participation

School governance structures provide important mechanisms for facilitating communication and collaboration between schools and surrounding communities. Boards of management, parent associations, community leaders, and other stakeholders contribute to decision-making processes that influence school operations and community relations. Participatory governance approaches promote inclusivity, transparency, accountability, and shared responsibility, thereby strengthening social bonds among stakeholders.

In conflict-affected settings, governance mechanisms can additionally serve peacebuilding functions by encouraging dialogue, addressing grievances, and fostering cooperation among diverse groups. Schools often act as neutral spaces where community members engage collectively in activities that support educational development and social stability. Consequently, effective school governance contributes both to educational improvement and to wider processes of community cohesion.

Research Gap

Although considerable scholarship exists on conflict in Kenya, educational leadership, school governance, and social cohesion, these themes have largely been examined independently. Existing studies provide valuable insights into the causes and consequences of conflict as well as the role of educational institutions in community development. However, limited historical research has specifically examined how educational leadership contributed to the promotion of social cohesion in conflict-affected communities over an extended period. This study addresses that gap by investigating the historical relationship between educational leadership, conflict, and community cohesion in Molo and Kuresoi between 1991 and 2010.

Theoretical Underpinning

This article was theoretically underpinned by Conflict Transformation Theory and Social Capital Theory. The two theories were employed as complementary rather than competing analytical perspectives. Conflict Transformation Theory, principally associated with John Paul Lederach, provided the overarching lens for understanding the historical development, persistence and transformation of conflict and the changes that occurred in relationships, structures and social patterns surrounding conflict (Lederach, 1995, 1997). Social Capital Theory, particularly as developed by Robert D. Putnam, complements this perspective by explaining the relational and institutional resources through which trust, reciprocity, networks and cooperation are developed and sustained within communities (Putnam, 2000). The combination is appropriate because the article is concerned not only with how conflict has affected education and educational institutions, but also with how educational leadership influenced contributed to social cohesion.

Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict Transformation Theory provides the primary theoretical foundation for this article. Developed principally through the work of John Paul Lederach, the theory conceptualises conflict as more than an isolated episode of violence or a problem requiring immediate settlement (Lederach, 1995, 1997).

Conflict transformation examines both the immediate manifestations of conflict and the broader processes through which relationships and social structures can be reconstructed.

The theory consequently enables this article to examine how conflict affected educational institutions and how educational leaders responded to changing conflict conditions. Rather than treating education merely as a casualty of violence, the theory permits an examination of schools as institutions embedded within wider social relationships and as possible spaces for reconstructing those relationships. Research in Kenya has similarly applied Lederach's framework to peace education, emphasising the interaction between personal, relational, structural and cultural dimensions of conflict transformation (Mwanzia, 2015).

Evidence from northern Uganda demonstrates that schools can become institutional spaces for promoting reconciliation, communication and problem-solving following prolonged conflict (Cunningham, 2014), while research from Kenya has shown the relevance of teacher empowerment and peace education to conflict transformation (Ndiku, 2021; Mwanzia, 2015).

Although it provides a powerful explanation of how relationships and structures can be transformed, it does not, by itself, sufficiently specify the social resources and everyday networks through which trust, reciprocity and cooperation are generated and sustained within a school-community setting. This limitation created the theoretical space for Social Capital Theory. it addressed an analytical dimension that Conflict Transformation heory does not fully operationalise.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory provided the complementary theoretical lens for examining the networks, relationships, norms and forms of trust that connect schools to the communities in which they operate. Putnam conceptualises social capital in terms of social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness associated with those networks (Putnam, 2000). From this perspective, relationships constitute resources because they can facilitate communication, cooperation and collective action. Social capital was therefore relevant to educational institutions because schools are not isolated bureaucratic structures; they were embedded within networks involving families, teachers, learners, community leaders and other stakeholders.

The application of Social Capital Theory to this article made it possible to examine the mechanisms through which community relationships were built, maintained, weakened or reconstructed in the South Rift. School governance provided an important institutional arena for such processes because interaction among school leaders, parents, teachers, boards and communities can generate opportunities for consultation, participation, reciprocity and trust. Kenyan research on school-family-community partnerships have explicitly employed Social Capital Theory and found that relationships among schools, families and communities are important to the social fabric of educational institutions, while also identifying limitations in the depth of collaboration between these actors (Zanoni, 2017).

Social Capital Theory also strengthened the article's analysis of community cohesion. If cohesion involves more than the absence of violence and included the capacity of people from different social groups to interact, cooperate and develop mutual trust, then attention must be paid to the networks through which such relationships are produced (Zanoni, 2017). Social capital explained the existence and consequences of networks, trust and reciprocity, but it do not adequately explain the historical origins, evolution and transformation of the conflicts that shape those relationships (Putnam, 2000). Social Capital Theory therefore required complementary conflict-oriented framework capable of explaining the historical processes through which relationships become conflictual and subsequently undergo transformation.

Complementarity of the Two Theories

The combination of Conflict Transformation Theory and Social Capital Theory makes the theoretical framework of this article more holistic because the two theories answer different but interconnected questions. The first theory therefore provides the broader historical and transformational explanation, while the second provided an ides a relational and institutional explanation of the mechanisms through which social cohesion can be produced or weakened.

The relationship between the theories could therefore be understood sequentially and analytically. The historical experience of conflict provided the context within which relationships between communities and institutions become strained. Conflict Transformation Theory then helps the article examine how educational leaders responded to these conflictual conditions and whether relationships and structures changed over time.

The complementary framework was particularly suitable for analysing educational leadership. From the Conflict Transformation perspective, educational leaders were examined as actors situated within historically conflictual relationships and institutional structures. From the Social Capital perspective, the same leaders were examined in relation to their capacity to facilitate communication, participation, trust and cooperation among teachers, learners, parents, school governing bodies and surrounding communities (Cunningham, 2014; Millican et al., 2021).

Accordingly, this article employs Conflict Transformation Theory as the overarching explanatory framework and Social Capital Theory as its complementary relational framework. Conflict Transformation Theory provided the historical lens for tracing the changing nature and consequences of conflict in the South Rift 1991-2010, while Social Capital Theory provided the lens for analysing school governance, school-community relationships, stakeholder participation, trust, reciprocity and cooperation. Their integration enabled the article to move analytically from conflict and its educational consequences, through educational leadership, to the processes through which community relationships and cohesion may be reconstructed.

Theoretical Proposition

The theoretical position advanced in this article was that the capacity of education leaders to contribute to community cohesion in a conflict-affected environment depends not only on the transformation of conflictual relationships and structures but also on the development of social networks, trust, reciprocity and cooperation within and around educational institutions. The two theories consequently provide a complementary framework for understanding how educational leadership mediated the relationship between historical conflict and community cohesion in Kenya's South Rift 1991-2010.

Statement of the Problem

Conflict has remained a persistent feature of the historical development of Molo and Kuresoi in Kenya’s Rift Valley Region, particularly during the transition to multiparty politics and subsequent electoral periods between 1991 and 2010. Manifestations of conflict included ethnic tensions, politically motivated violence, land-related disputes, displacement, insecurity, and weakened inter-community relations. These conflicts affected key social institutions, including schools, through disruption of teaching and learning, destruction of educational infrastructure, displacement of learners and teachers, interrupted enrolment, and weakened school-community relationships. In situations of protracted conflict, schools are expected not only to provide education but also to serve as spaces that promote inclusion, dialogue, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence among diverse groups.

Educational leaders and school governance structures therefore play an important role in maintaining learning continuity, supporting conflict-affected learners, strengthening relationships among stakeholders, and fostering social cohesion within and beyond schools. Existing scholarship in Kenya has extensively examined the causes and consequences of conflict, particularly in relation to land, ethnicity, political competition, displacement, and inter-community relations. Similarly, studies on education have explored school leadership, inclusive education, post-conflict schooling, parental participation, and educational management (Kitur, 2011; Wanjiru, 2018, 2020, 2021; Koech, 2024; Cherotich et al., 2022; Ngetich, 2024). While these studies provide valuable insights, they have generally examined conflict, educational leadership, and community cohesion as separate areas of inquiry.

Consequently, limited historical scholarship has integrated these dimensions to explain how educational leadership responded to changing conflict conditions and contributed to social cohesion in conflict-affected communities over time. This gap is particularly evident in Molo and Kuresoi, areas that experienced recurrent episodes of violence and displacement during the study period. Therefore, despite the growing literature on conflict and education in Kenya, insufficient historical attention has been given to the role of educational leadership in promoting social cohesion within conflict-affected communities. This study addresses that gap by examining the historical relationship between conflict, educational leadership, and social cohesion in Molo and Kuresoi between 1991 and 2010.

Research Design

This article adopted a historical research design based exclusively on secondary data. Historical research was concerned with the systematic investigation, interpretation and explanation of past events, processes and experiences in order to understand their causes, development, consequences and contemporary significance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The design was appropriate because the study examined the relationship between conflict, educational leadership and community cohesion in Kenya’s Molo and Kuresoi from 1991-2010.

The study relied on documentary evidence rather than the collection of primary data from respondents. Secondary sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, theses and dissertations, policy documents, institutional reports and other scholarly publications relevant to conflict transformation, education in conflict-affected settings, educational leadership, school governance, social capital and community cohesion. The use of multiple documentary sources enabled the study to reconstruct historical developments, compare scholarly interpretations and identify patterns across different periods and contexts.

Accordingly, sources were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives, scholarly credibility, methodological transparency, publication status and contribution to understanding the Kenya's Molo and Kuresoi areas from 1991–2010.

Counties and comparable conflict-affected educational contexts.

To enhance credibility, the study applied source triangulation across books, journal articles, theses, dissertations, and institutional reports. Triangulation strengthened the reliability of interpretations by allowing evidence from multiple sources to be compared and corroborated.As Creswell and Creswell (2018) observed, the quality of a study depended partly on the systematic alignment of its evidence, analytical procedures and research questions.

Sources of Data

The study used secondary data obtained from four main categories of sources. The first category comprised scholarly books on historical research, conflict transformation, social capital, peacebuilding,

education in emergencies and educational leadership.

The second category consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles. These articles provided empirical findings and theoretical discussions concerning conflict, education leaders, school-community relationships, social cohesion, peace education and institutional responses in Kenya and other conflict-affected contexts.

The third category comprised theses and dissertations, especially those produced by Kenyan and African universities. Such sources were valuable because they often contain detailed contextual analyses, historical accounts and empirical material that may not be available in journal publications.

The fourth category included policy, programme, and institutional reports.. These sources were used to supplement academic literature and to provide information on education policy, conflict management, school governance and peacebuilding initiatives.

Sources of data were analysed thematically based on research article objectives. Data that were not relevant to the study objectives were excluded from the final analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection involved a structured review of documentary sources. The process began with the identification of key concepts derived from the research objectives and theoretical framework. These concepts included conflict, educational leadership, community participation, trust, reciprocity, social networks, peacebuilding and cohesion. These terms were used to guide searches in academic databases, university repositories, library catalogues and institutional websites.

The review was iterative rather than strictly linear. As new themes emerged, additional searches were conducted to clarify concepts, verify historical claims and locate alternative interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This enabled the researcher to identify gaps in the literature and distinguish between claims supported by several sources and claims advanced by only one author.

Data Analysis

The collected documentary data were analysed using thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Content analysis, in contrast, provided a systematic procedure for examining the presence, meaning and relationships of words, concepts, themes and arguments in textual material (Krippendorff, 2018).

The analysis followed several stages. First, the selected sources were read repeatedly to develop familiarity with their content and context. Second, relevant passages were coded according to their relationship with the research objectives.

The analysis was also informed by the two theoretical perspectives guiding the article. Conflict Transformation Theory sensitised the analysis to changes in relationships, structures, institutions and patterns of interaction before, during and after conflict (Lederach, 1995, 1997). Social Capital Theory directed attention to networks, trust, reciprocity, participation and cooperation within schools and between schools and communities (Putnam, 2000). The theories were not used to impose predetermined conclusions on the data. Rather, they provided analytical concepts through which documentary evidence could be interpreted and connected to the research objectives.

Historical comparison was used to examine continuity and change across the period under study. Evidence was compared across different phases of conflict, post-conflict recovery and institutional adjustment. Attention was given to whether educational institutions remained vulnerable to conflict, adapted their practices, developed peacebuilding functions or contributed to the reconstruction of

community relationships.

Ethical Considerations

Although the study did not involve direct interaction with human participants, ethical considerations remained important. All sources were acknowledged through appropriate citation and referencing. The study avoided plagiarism, misrepresentation and selective quotation. Documentary evidence was interpreted in context, particularly where sources addressed sensitive issues involving ethnicity, displacement, political violence and community conflict. The researcher also avoided presenting contested historical claims as established facts and indicated where evidence was limited, contradictory or derived from a particular institutional perspective.

Limitations of the Research Design

Some experiences were underrepresented because they were not documented, were documented by institutions with particular interests or remain inaccessible. Documentary sources also contained retrospective bias, incomplete information or differing interpretations of the same events. In addition, findings from comparable conflict-affected contexts cannot automatically be generalised to the South Rift.

These limitations were addressed through source triangulation, critical evaluation of documentary evidence and cautious interpretation. The study does not claim to provide an exhaustive account of every educational institution or community in the Rift Valley in Molo and Kuresoi area .

4.0 Findings

4.1 Historical Nature and Changing Patterns of Conflict in Molo and Kuresoi (1991–2010)

The findings indicate that conflict in Molo and Kuresoi evolved as a recurring historical phenomenon rather than a series of isolated incidents. The reintroduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s intensified disputes associated with land ownership, ethnicity, political competition and access to resources. Major episodes of violence occurred during the 1992–1993, 1997–1998 and 2007–2008 electoral periods, demonstrating the cyclical nature of conflict in the region. Historical evidence further suggests that unresolved grievances relating to land, settlement patterns, political representation and ethnic identity continued to influence inter-community relations long after periods of active violence had subsided.

The educational consequences of conflict were substantial. Schools experienced destruction of infrastructure, displacement of learners and teachers, disruption of teaching and learning, teacher transfers and declines in learner attendance. Conflict affected not only the physical operation of schools but also the social relationships upon which effective teaching and learning depend. Psychological trauma, weakened trust among stakeholders and fragmentation of communities undermined educational participation and institutional stability.

The 2007–2008 post-election violence reinforced these patterns by generating further displacement and educational disruption. Schools increasingly received learners from conflict-affected households whose educational experiences had been interrupted by violence and displacement. Consequently, schools were required to address both immediate educational needs and the longer-term social and emotional consequences of conflict. The findings therefore demonstrate that the relationship between conflict and education was multidimensional, extending beyond direct disruption to include enduring effects on social relations, inclusion and community cohesion.

Overall, the findings establish that conflict in Molo and Kuresoi repeatedly affected schools through three interconnected pathways: disruption of educational operations, long-term psychosocial consequences for learners and teachers, and weakening of social relationships within schools and surrounding communities. These effects created significant challenges for educational leaders and governance structures seeking to maintain educational continuity and social stability.

4.2 Responses of Educational Leaders to Conflict

The findings indicate that educational leadership in conflict-affected communities extended beyond conventional administrative responsibilities. School leaders were required to respond to displacement, changing learner populations, weakened social relationships and the educational consequences of violence while maintaining the core functions of schooling. Leadership therefore became both an educational and social responsibility involving institutional recovery, inclusion and community engagement.

One significant response involved the promotion of collaborative and participatory leadership practices. Educational leaders increasingly encouraged teacher participation in decision-making processes, leadership teams and task groups. These arrangements enhanced institutional capacity by distributing responsibilities among staff members and creating collective approaches to addressing the educational needs of conflict-affected learners. Although formal accountability structures remained hierarchical, collaborative leadership strengthened school responsiveness during periods of instability.

Educational leaders also promoted inclusion and learner support. School leadership involved mediating post-conflict tensions, supporting displaced learners, fostering socio-moral connectedness and maintaining access to education for vulnerable groups. These interventions aimed to rebuild relationships within school communities while reducing exclusion and supporting educational participation among learners affected by conflict and displacement.

Peace education emerged as another important leadership response. Following the 2007–2008 post-election violence, schools increasingly incorporated peace education, life-skills education, dialogue and conflict-resolution initiatives into learning programmes. Educational leaders played a central role in supporting implementation and creating opportunities for learners and teachers to engage with issues of peacebuilding and coexistence. However, implementation was constrained by shortages of trained teachers, limited instructional materials, inadequate funding and insufficient time allocation within school programmes.

The findings additionally show that leadership effectiveness depended upon broader organisational capacities, including instructional supervision, staff motivation, teamwork and human-resource management. Effective management of teachers and school personnel contributed to institutional stability and enabled schools to continue operating despite conflict-related disruptions. Nevertheless, inadequate resources, teacher shortages and structural constraints limited the effectiveness of leadership interventions in several schools.

Overall, educational leaders responded to conflict through participatory leadership, inclusion of conflict-affected learners, mediation of social tensions, peace education, teacher development and institutional management. These interventions contributed to educational continuity and community stability, although their effectiveness varied according to available resources, institutional capacity and local conditions.

4.3 School Governance, School–Community Relations and Social Cohesion

The findings demonstrate that school governance structures played an important role in strengthening

relationships between schools and surrounding communities. School leaders increasingly collaborated with parents, school management committees, boards of management, faith-based organisations and other stakeholders in addressing educational challenges. These collaborative arrangements created opportunities for communication, resource mobilisation, collective decision-making and community participation.

School governance further functioned as an important institutional interface between schools and communities during periods of instability. Governance structures facilitated stakeholder engagement, information sharing and collaborative problem-solving, thereby strengthening the capacity of schools to remain functional despite conflict-related challenges. In several instances, parents and community members contributed to educational recovery efforts and supported initiatives aimed at improving learner welfare and institutional stability.

However, the findings indicate that community participation remained uneven. While formal governance structures existed, stakeholder engagement was not always consistent or inclusive. Limitations included low parental participation, weak collaboration with some external stakeholders and insufficient psychosocial sensitisation programmes. These constraints reduced the potential effectiveness of governance mechanisms in promoting sustained community involvement and social cohesion.

Despite these challenges, the findings suggest that school governance contributed to community cohesion by promoting participation, communication, cooperation and shared responsibility among school stakeholders. Through these processes, schools served not only as educational institutions but also as community spaces where relationships could be strengthened and collective responses to conflict-related challenges could be developed. The effectiveness of governance structures in promoting cohesion, however, depended on the quality of participation, trust and collaboration among stakeholders.

Verdict

After replacing the findings with the version above and deleting paragraphs 97–106, the manuscript becomes significantly cleaner and more journal-oriented because:

Findings are aligned directly with the research objectives.

Repetition is removed.

Findings and discussion are clearly separated.

The paper is reduced by nearly a page without losing substantive content.

This is the version I recommend retaining for KEMI submission.

5.0 Discussion of Findings

5.1 Historical Patterns of Conflict and Their Implications for Education

The findings demonstrate that conflict in Molo and Kuresoi between 1991 and 2010 was recurrent and deeply embedded within broader political, ethnic, and land-related grievances. The cyclical nature of violence during election periods confirms previous scholarship that identifies unresolved historical and structural tensions as major contributors to conflict in Kenya’s Rift Valley. The study further shows that conflict extended beyond immediate physical violence to include long-term effects on educational access, learner participation, school stability, and community relationships. These findings support existing literature that characterises schools as both victims of conflict and critical institutions for post-conflict recovery and social reconstruction.

The findings also reveal that educational disruptions arising from displacement, destruction of school infrastructure, teacher mobility, and learner absenteeism undermined the effective delivery of education. In addition, psychological trauma and weakened trust among community members affected the social environment necessary for effective teaching and learning. The study therefore reinforces the argument that educational recovery in conflict-affected communities requires attention to both institutional rebuilding and the restoration of social relationships.

5.2 Educational Leadership Responses to Conflict and Community Cohesion

The findings indicate that educational leadership played an important role in mitigating the effects of conflict and promoting social cohesion. School leaders extended their responsibilities beyond administrative management to include mediation, learner support, community engagement, conflict resolution, and the promotion of peaceful coexistence. These findings are consistent with literature emphasising the broader social responsibilities of educational leaders in conflict-affected environments.

Participatory leadership emerged as a significant strategy for strengthening institutional resilience. By encouraging teacher involvement in decision-making and promoting collaborative leadership practices, school leaders created opportunities for collective problem-solving and shared responsibility. Such practices enhanced organisational capacity while fostering a sense of ownership and inclusion among stakeholders. The findings suggest that leadership approaches based on participation and collaboration are particularly valuable in contexts characterised by uncertainty and social fragmentation.

The study further found that educational leaders promoted inclusion by supporting conflict-affected learners, facilitating dialogue, and encouraging peaceful interactions within school communities. Peace education programmes, life-skills initiatives, and conflict-resolution activities were used to strengthen learners' understanding of coexistence and social responsibility. Although implementation was constrained by limitations in resources, funding, instructional materials, and teacher preparation, these initiatives contributed to rebuilding relationships and strengthening community cohesion.

5.3 School Governance, Social Capital and Community Participation

The findings highlight the importance of school governance structures in promoting collaboration between schools and communities. Boards of management, parents, community leaders, religious organisations, and other stakeholders participated in educational decision-making and supported school improvement initiatives. Through these interactions, schools became important sites for communication, cooperation, and community engagement.

The study demonstrates that governance structures contributed to the development of social capital by strengthening networks of trust, reciprocity, and collective responsibility among stakeholders. Community participation enhanced resource mobilisation supported educational recovery, and improved communication between schools and surrounding communities. These findings support previous arguments that schools can serve as important institutions for rebuilding social relationships in conflict-affected environments.

However, the findings also reveal limitations in stakeholder participation, including inconsistent parental involvement and varying levels of community engagement. These challenges suggest that school governance structures alone cannot guarantee social cohesion unless accompanied by sustained efforts to strengthen trust, participation, and shared ownership among stakeholders.

5.4 Theoretical Implications

The findings support the explanatory value of both Conflict Transformation Theory and Social Capital

Theory. Conflict Transformation Theory helps explain how educational leaders contributed to addressing underlying social divisions through dialogue, participation, mediation, and peacebuilding activities. Rather than focusing solely on the management of immediate disputes, educational leadership initiatives sought to transform relationships and strengthen conditions for long-term coexistence.

Social Capital Theory complements this perspective by illustrating how schools functioned as sites for generating trust, social networks, cooperation, and collective action. Through governance structures, community engagement, and collaborative leadership practices, educational institutions facilitated interactions that strengthened social cohesion despite persistent conflict-related challenges.

The combined application of the two theories therefore provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between educational leadership, community participation, and social cohesion in conflict-affected settings.

6.0 Conclusion

Educational leadership played a significant role in promoting social cohesion in conflict-affected communities in Molo and Kuresoi between 1991 and 2010. The study established that recurrent conflicts associated with political competition, ethnic divisions, land disputes and population displacement disrupted educational processes and weakened community relationships. Schools experienced learner displacement, interruptions to teaching and learning, destruction of infrastructure and challenges in maintaining stable educational environments. These effects extended beyond periods of direct violence and continued to influence educational participation, institutional stability and social interaction within schools and surrounding communities.

The study further demonstrated that educational leaders responded to these challenges through participatory leadership, peace education initiatives, learner support mechanisms, mediation of post-conflict tensions, teacher development and strengthened school-community collaboration. These interventions enabled schools to maintain educational continuity while also addressing the social consequences of conflict. Educational leadership therefore extended beyond administrative responsibilities to include relationship building, inclusion, conflict transformation and community engagement.

The findings also established that school governance structures contributed to social cohesion by facilitating communication, participation and collective decision-making among stakeholders. Collaboration among school leaders, teachers, parents, boards of management, faith-based organisations and community members strengthened opportunities for trust building, cooperation and collective action. However, the effectiveness of these efforts depended on the quality of participation, availability of resources, institutional capacity and sustained commitment to peacebuilding activities.

Overall, the study concludes that educational leadership constitutes an important mechanism through which schools can contribute to conflict transformation and social cohesion in conflict-affected communities. Although schools cannot resolve all structural causes of conflict, they provide important spaces in which trust can be rebuilt, dialogue encouraged, diversity accommodated and peaceful coexistence strengthened. The integration of Conflict Transformation Theory and Social Capital Theory demonstrates that educational leadership and school governance can play a meaningful role in facilitating the movement from conflict-related disruption towards greater community cohesion and social stability.

6.1 Recommendations

Strengthen conflict-sensitive educational leadership training. The Ministry of Education, Teacher Service

Commission, and educational leadership training institutions should integrate peacebuilding, mediation, conflict management, and community engagement competencies into leadership development programmes.

Enhance school-community partnerships. Schools should strengthen collaboration with parents, community leaders, faith-based organizations, and local administration to support social cohesion initiatives and early conflict prevention mechanisms.

Institutionalize peace education programmes. Educational institutions in conflict-prone regions should integrate peace education, dialogue forums, and conflict resolution activities into both curricular and co-curricular programmes.

Improve psychosocial support for learners and teachers. Educational policy should support counselling services and trauma-informed interventions for learners and teachers affected by conflict and displacement.

Strengthen participatory school governance. Boards of Management, parent associations, and community stakeholders should be actively involved in decision-making processes that promote inclusion, trust, and community ownership of educational initiatives.

6.2 Areas for Further Research

Future studies should examine the role of educational leadership in promoting social cohesion in other conflict-affected regions of Kenya to facilitate comparative analysis across contexts. Further research may also investigate the experiences of learners, teachers, parents, and community leaders using primary data approaches. In addition, studies could evaluate the effectiveness of specific leadership interventions, peace education programmes, and school-community partnerships in strengthening social cohesion and conflict transformation outcomes.

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