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A Model Explaining Student Militancy in Secondary Schools: Kenyan Perspective

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Lewis M. Ngesu

Senior lecturer- University of Nairobi

Mary Ngina Mulonzi

Maths teacher-Tudor day secondary school-Mombasa

Agnes Njoki Mugo

Part-time lecturer and PhD student-University of Nairobi

Gideon Kasivu

Principal Makutano secondary school and PhD student-
University of Nairobi-Kenya

Abstract: *Student upheavals and activism is not a recent phenomenon in Kenya, but has been a problem over the years. Indeed the upheavals can be closely linked to adolescence. The nature of student upheavals in secondary schools is multi-faceted as it involves indiscipline that is destructive of the individual student, school property and the school community where such upheavals take place. The main objective of this study was to construct a theoretical model that establishes a causal relationship between student militancy, social-cultural environment and personal growth. Data was collected from 238 students, 16 secondary school head teachers, educational experts and community stakeholders by use of questionnaires, focus group discussion and interviews. The collected data was quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. The findings revealed that student militancy is a social phenomenon common in many Kenyan secondary schools, although its nature and magnitude varied across the geographical locations of the sampled schools. In the light of these findings, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education should review the situation existing in Kenyan schools with a view to determining the social problems that make students' lives more and more meaningless.*

1. Introduction:

The beginnings of 'open' radical thought, revolt or even anarchy among learners can be traced back to the 19th century. Similarly terse and sometimes even more dramatic description of turbulent youth character were given well before this by Thomas Hobbes in relation to disloyalty in seventeenth-century English universities and by Martin Luther, in connection with his German university student supporters against the church (Moller, 1968: 238), as well as decades after this by Engels himself, in relation to the plan by 40,000 Russian students to emigrate to Western Europe to internationalize a proletarian revolution in the 19th century (Avineri, 1967: 154), by Karl Marx in connection with what he called naïve left-wing adventurists and unscholastic political romanticists (Blumenberg, 1972: 46-47) and, indeed, by many sociological and political analysts of the twentieth-century youth movements.

As with humanity, student militancy in Africa constitutes a complex phenomenon, affirming Aristotle's contention that, in consideration of mankind, one should realize that the parts are greater than whole. There is no doubt that the current period of African history is volatile, characterized by both a sense of hope and despair, and that change will bring with it new possibilities in terms of lifestyles, moral politics and consciousness.

In modern times, conflictual relations and tensions have been witnessed more intensively across campuses in Africa, especially since the mid- 1960s (Ishumi, 1990: 64, Omari and Mihyo, 1992). These conflicts have frequently been more open than latent reflecting the struggle for recognition, power and rights. In Africa, student struggles have been observed not only in universities but also in other institutions of higher education and training and even in secondary schools.

Studies have shown that the major problem facing Kenya's institutions of learning is student violence. The disturbances have been sparked off by the failure of students to heed government demands and vice versa. The consequences have been far reaching, namely, the closure of universities for long periods, expulsions, failure, fines, deaths of students, damage to property and loss of national resources through lost man- hours as well as unutilized teaching and learning facilities. Throughout the years, brute force, closures and dialogue have been used with the aim of providing the remedy, but lasting solutions cannot be said to have been found, for student moods are highly unpredictable (Bogonko, 1992).

At one time, secondary school unrest (and violent incidents) used to be attributed to the bad influence of students' older brothers at the University. Back then in the 1990s, university demonstrations and stone-throwing incidences were commonplace, but now with the introduction of parallel programmes in Kenyan Universities, these incidents have been reduced to sporadic occurrences. Therefore, even though there was a time in Kenyan history when riots in secondary schools could honestly be blamed on the behaviour of University students, Kenyans have found that new riotous behaviour is to be blamed for such incidents. As such, the question remains, does a riotous society teach the youth in the society to riot?

2. Objective Of The Study:

The main objective of this study was to construct a theoretical model that establishes a causal relationship between student militancy, social-cultural environment and personal growth.

3. Results And Discussions:

In relation to the causes of student militancy, as perceived by respondents, a relationship emerged between the selected demographic variables and student militancy. To test the relationship, logistic regression was used. The regression model was generated using SPSS version 15.0. The regression analysis incorporated a step-wise variable selection process that utilized the variables of gender, age, facility, type, location and category.

The variables of gender, age, facility, type, location and category are categorical and were coded 0 or 1. Membership of a particular category was signified with a 1, while 0 signified a no response or no membership of the group. All variables were dropped out of the step-wise regression as indicated in Table 1 except those that were significant at $p < 0.05$ level of significance. The finding shows a significant relationship between the predictor variables and the criterion variable. The best predictor of student militancy was playing with objects when lessons are in progress. This was followed by being shabby which contributed 35.7%, poor teacher-student relationship, bullying, taking drugs and consumption of alcohol.

The findings demonstrate that within the school, gender was associated with playing with objects and being shabby. There was however no significant relationship between the gender of a student and acts of student behaviour such as poor teacher-student relations, bullying,

taking drugs and consumption of alcohol. Taken with the findings from earlier studies and the conceptual framework developed for this study, these findings indicate that the social-economic context of student militancy is related to a wide range of student attitudes, motives and behaviours.

Violence Indicators	Predictor Variables					
	Gender	Age	School status	School type	Geographical location of school	School category
Playing with objects	0.044*	0.390**	0.017*	0.442* *	0.564**	0.000*
Being Shabby	0.001*	0.358**	0.697**	0.020*	0.944**	0.000*
Poor teacher-student relations	0.060**	0.914**	0.019*	0.179**	0.285**	0.740**
Bullying	0.615**	0.032*	0.729**	0.441**	0.104**	0.152**
Taking drugs	0.116**	0.067**	0.436**	0.009*	0.013*	0.132**
Consumption of alcohol	0.151**	0.581**	0.821**	0.483**	0.015*	0.287**

Table 1: Logistic regression analysis of student militant behaviour.

*= Significant ($p < 0.05$), ** = Not significant, School status= (Boarding, Day and boarding+ day), School type (Single sex and Mixed), Geographical location= (Urban and rural), School category= (Provincial and district).

Secondly, the findings showed a significant relationship between bullying and the age of students. The results show that bullying is a major cause of a growing number of incidents of militant behaviour in school and it warrants attention from educators starting at a very early level. Further, bullying has many negative effects on students even before violent retaliation occurs. Students who have been bullied have lower self-esteem than their peers who have not been bullied.

The findings showed a significant relationship between school status and acts of behaviour, namely playing with objects and teacher-student relations. A chi-square test of association showed a significant relationship. The results show that playing with objects, when lessons were in progress, was common in all schools, whether day, mixed day and boarding or boarding, and was closely associated with peer culture. A chi-square test of association showed a significant relationship between teacher-student relations and the school status.

The study showed a significant relationship between drug taking and type of school. The results show that drug abuse was more likely in single-sex schools than in mixed schools. This is because in a single-sex school, the peer culture is quite strong and secondary school learners turn to their peers for guidance in matters of dress, identity, social attitudes and “acceptable behaviour”, but in mixed schools students may abstain from drug abuse for fear of being reprimanded by the opposite sex. In the present study, playing with objects, dressing shabbily, poor teacher-student relations, bullying and consumption of alcohol were not statistically significant. The finding also shows that there was a significant relationship between alcohol consumption and drug taking and the location of the school.

The results show that the environment in which the school is located plays a crucial role in influencing student militant behaviour. In addition, a chi-square test of association showed a highly significant relationship between playing with objects and dressing shabbily and the category of the school (provincial or district schools). The result shows that playing with objects and being shabby were prevalent in both rural and urban schools and this could be linked to the carefree lifestyles of the youth, poor performance, low self-esteem, frustration, and the absence of mentors. There was no significant relationship between teacher-student sexual relations, bullying, drug taking, or alcohol consumption with the category of school. In conclusion, the variables entered in the logistic regression indicate a significant relationship between the predictor variables and criterion variables.

3.1. A Model Accounting For The Social, Cultural And Psychological Factors That Prompt Student Militancy:

The study established that there is a significant relationship between students' circumstances on the one hand and patterns of student militancy on the other, as demonstrated in Figure 1. In summary, the figure illustrates various relationships as follows:

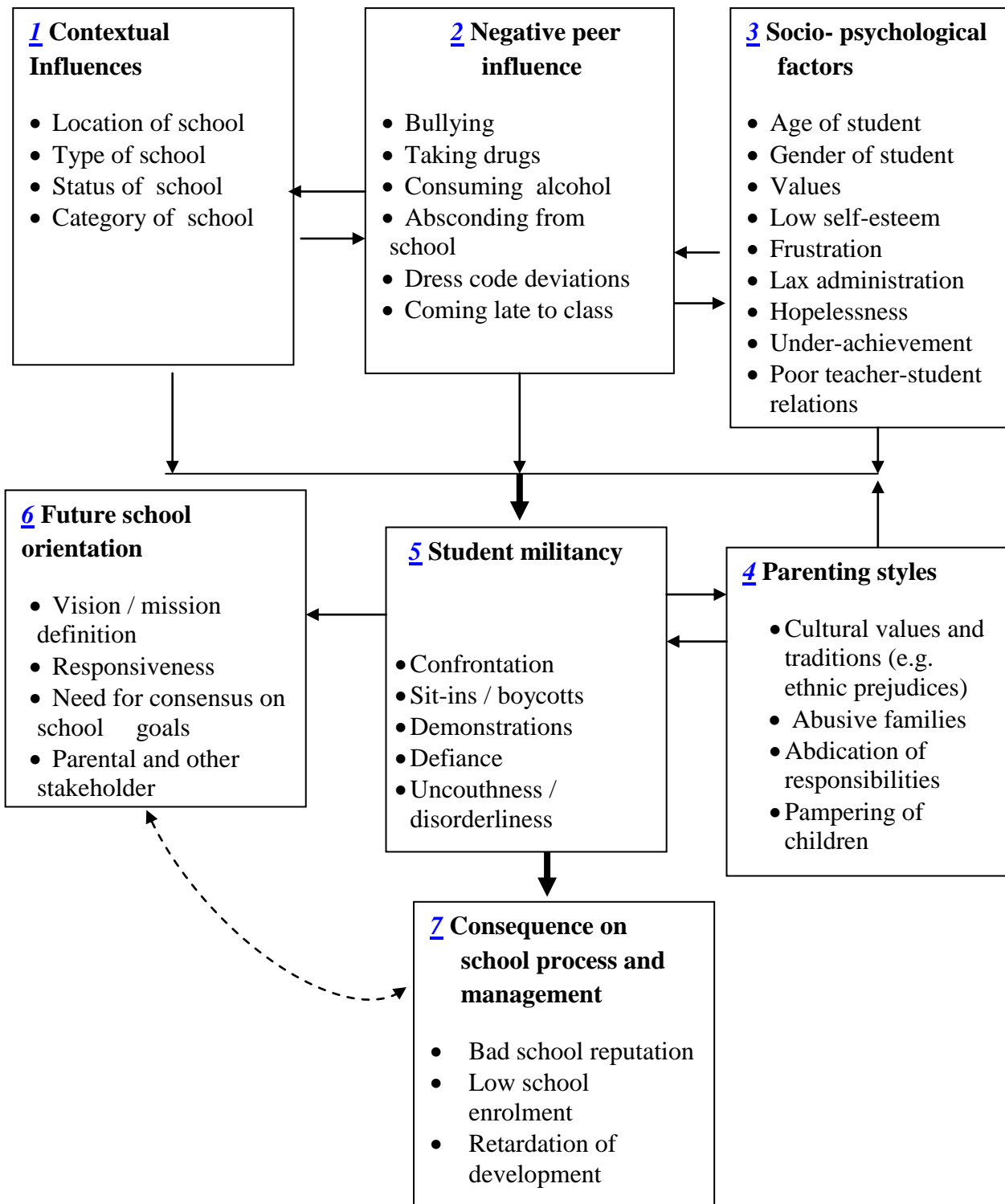


Figure 1: A model accounting for social, cultural and psychological factors that prompt militancy among school students

3.2. Explanation Of The Model:

- i. The variables of status, type, location and category of school (see Box 1) may interact, under certain circumstances, to cause student militancy, depending on the nature and disposition of peer influence at school (Box 2) and the socio-psychological factors or dispositions in the individual student (Box 3). The outcome of this interaction may, in turn, have a ripple effect in terms of what happens next.
- ii. This potential outcome is more of the catalytic function of both negative socio-environmental influences (Box 2) and socio-psychological factors and dispensations within or surrounding the students, such as values, self-esteem, the happiness-frustration balance and existing teacher-student relations (Box 3).
- iii. The combination of 1, 2 and 3 render a situation prone to student militancy (Box 5), especially where the socio-familial (in particular the parenting) style (Box 4) is not supportive of the school's expectations and rules and where there is little or no popular participation in defining, refining and/or reviewing institutional orientation, such as the institution's vision, mission and goals, consensus, and responsiveness (Box 6).
- iv. The consequences for the school lie in the balance. Depending very much on efforts made to review the school's situation vis-à-vis its future orientation (Box 6), the immediate and medium-range consequences may be negative (Box 7), in terms of public image and reputation, student enrolment and the school's development plans.
- v. Youth who live in an environment characterized by violence are prone to having an aggressive lifestyle. Such aggressive groups are likely to disrupt the normality of things, to exhibit antisocial behaviour, including face-to-face confrontation, intimidation, assault, and defiance of authority, and to use vulgar or else violent and combative language to win their positions.
- vi. Figure 1 represents a model that has thus been developed on the basis of the findings reported earlier. This model not only highlights the dynamic and complex nature of student militancy, but also contextualises student militancy in schools within the antecedents of the social and psychological characteristics of the school and familial environments, which in the end determine what choices are made and actions decided

upon. The model provides a simple but useful pointer to the importance of emphasising core leadership dimensions and qualities in schools. The findings also suggest that student militancy is a phenomenon involving many players and facets (negative peer influence, socio-psychological factors and parenting styles) which are influenced by, and in turn influence, the context in which it occurs. The intensity might vary across schools. Judging from the observations made above, including observations about the character and content of the Boxes above, the model provides a glimpse of a complicated yet important array of factors—causal or just co-relational—that are associated with student militancy. These factors could be viewed from four perspectives, namely:

- i. *Contextual influence*: This research established a reciprocal relationship between student militancy and predictor variables such as location, type, status and category of school;
- ii. *Negative peer influence*: The behaviour and actions of certain students influence their fellows, negatively affect the school order and tend to be disruptive of normal and progressive school activities. Such behaviour and actions include, but are not limited to, bullying, taking drugs, illicit consumption of alcohol, absconding from school, deviating from the school's dress code, and habitually coming late to class;
- iii. *Social-psychological factors*: Conflicting values, low self-esteem, frustration, lax administration, and hopelessness ('anomie'), under-achievement and poor teacher-student relations all contribute to breeding and stirring up revolts and rebellions among students; and
- iv. *Parenting styles*: The parents' action of abdicating 'parental' responsibilities (e.g. advising their children, disciplining them in accordance with nature of the misdemeanour, and withholding incessant pleasures for future advantage) as well as pampering their children and leading them to indulge in conspicuous consumption, and playing on ethnic prejudices in a multi-ethnic school environment all have a major effect.

3.3. Significance Of The Model For Theoretical Insight:

Apart from the general conceptual map and clarification model (Figure 1) which attempts to provide an understanding of the interplay of factors involved in student militancy, there are

four specific relationships indicated which *either* have not received particular attention from previous researchers, *or* have been overlooked, *or else* raise questions on some of the assumptions made previously by writers on student militancy. These four relationships—which contribute further to our knowledge on the subject—are as follows:

- i. Children enter school with a whole ‘cloak’ of personal values that are formed and shaped by the ‘parenting style’ of households in the dominant home environment. These values that are acquired by and implanted in the child in early and middle childhood at home undergo a gestation period during middle- and older childhood in the schooling period, and eventually ‘mature’ into a diversity of concrete social-action options, often within the realm of the school. Writers on school violence (for instance Paul, 1973: 219-247; Etisi, 2008:13-18) have often overlooked the role of the ‘child-rearing’ practices of the household, relating student action only to sources within the school. They thus ignore the longer relationship traceable back to pre-school sources and child-rearing practices within the environment of the family.
- ii. Within the discourse on student militancy, some characteristics have been ignored that are relevant, particularly *student values*, *level of self-esteem* and *level of frustration*. These constitute a potent causative combination within the student, which is capable of producing strong reactions to a punitive school management team or administration in an unpredictable and destructive manner. This potential relationship existing between students’ socio-cultural-psychological status and the school management has not been stated at all in explicit terms in earlier studies—for instance by Kimweli (1997:1-20) and Mutie (2004:11-13)—concerning student militancy in the Kenyan scene. Yet this seemingly dormant combination of socio-psycho-cultural factors may at any moment stir up hostilities. Therefore any school management team (head-teacher, teachers and other school administrators) is recommended to consider these factors when contemplating decisions and strategies aimed at pre-empting, controlling or moderating student unrest and school riots.
- iii. The daily student-student and student-teacher interactions and exchanges carried on within the school could (and often do), in due course, determine the ethos and quality of the school learning environment, the personal growth of the students and the level of their academic achievement. Many students who misbehave in schools do so not for its own sake but because they are simply enveloped within a circumscribed

environment in which they are continually looking for “pathways” to establish and maintain a sense of self-fulfilment and balance as they navigate their way through unpredictable conditions that they are exposed to a new world of impersonal relations. This particular aspect has not been explored in many studies in the western world (see, for instance Rosen, 1997: 1-6, 89-93 and Harber, 2007:10 -11), and not at all in African school settings, including Kenya. But it is of great importance to youths as they journey through school, which can be a breeding ground for student militant behaviour.

- iv. The nature, magnitude or complexity of student militancy within a particular school setting is such that, once it has occurred, it may not necessarily yield to simple, standard or conventional (predefined, ready-made) formulae for problem solving and conflict resolution. This is what seems to be suggested by studies such as those of Wagoco, 2007: 66-67 and Wangai, 2001: 80-81, which limit student militancy to certain geographical patterns. This is an erroneous view of a phenomenon whose emergence, potential dimensions and unpredictability often lie beyond the powers of conventional wisdom but which call for innovative, often unconventional, problem-solving skills and tactics — which all head-teachers, especially those in Kenya, would stand to benefit from acquiring in a management course specifically designed for the purpose.

4. Conclusions:

Student militancy seems to stem from a combination of factors (a restrictive, intolerant, hyper-critical or else punitive administration, negative peer influence, contextual influences, socio-psychological factors and parenting styles) as shown in Figure 1. This implies that the causes of student militancy are varied and complex and reflect a combination of past events and current stresses and strains within individuals, schools and the community. The administrative style of the school management team in responding to some of the challenges tends to inflame student militancy and youth revolt across different locations. Efficient school administration helps to create a warm learning environment and hence less militant students, while an inefficient administration is likely to accelerate more militant behaviour among students.

Although the causes of student militancy are firmly rooted in the socio-historical experiences of growing up (child-rearing practices, parenting styles and responses, and the youths' personality traits), school governance, among intra-school factors, seems to have had a precipitating influence on student revolts and riots. This is a causal factor linked to a stern, hyper-critical and otherwise punitive approach by school managements. A significant proportion of newly appointed heads of secondary schools in the study sample lacked prior management experience, which had a negative impact on school discipline and the general performance of their school. Therefore the government should aim at building the capacity of the leadership, comprising having a vision, setting directions, developing people and managing the teaching and learning programmes, leading to a reduction in malpractices that have a negative impact on school discipline and academic performance.

5. Recommendations:

5.1. Training And Retraining Of Heads Of School For Efficient And Effective Leadership:

It has been observed that school governance, among the intra-school factors, seems to have had a precipitating influence on students' revolts and riots. In some incidences, appointments of head teachers and their deputies at provincial and district levels are not based on qualifications, experience or competence in educational management as provided in the scheme of service, but on other parameters, such as religious and political affiliation. The Kenyan government should therefore intensify its efforts to train and retrain head teachers and their deputies through conducting induction courses, seminars and refresher courses on management in order for them to run schools efficiently and effectively.

5.2. Need For School-Community Partnership:

The findings of this study have revealed that community partnership is fundamental for the prevention of student militancy in secondary schools. This is because community involvement and support facilitates communication between school staff and parents about students who are experiencing difficulties. It is therefore recommended that the Government of Kenya should develop a code of conduct for students, in consultation with the stakeholders of the school, concerning all aspects of the education policy, as well as the formulation and

implementation of new laws with a view to involving parents and the community and providing consistency in dealing with actions by students.

5.3. In-Service Programmes For Teachers:

It has been found that the problem of student militancy stems from a combination of factors, including parenting styles, negative peer influence and lax administration among other factors. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education should take every opportunity to inform key stakeholders of the key results of the study and of its key recommendations. Through dissemination of the research findings, the policy makers in the Ministry of Education can address the training needs of teachers through definitive in-service programmes. The in-service programmes should outline long-term goals for the training of teacher educators as well as aim at improving teachers' management skills. The underlying rationale is to ensure that teachers are aware of and conversant with emerging issues that include the rights of the child, guidance services, globalization and its effects on education, reformative measures to correct aberrant behaviour and other areas of knowledge relevant for content delivery and classroom management. Thus, in-service programmes should aim at developing and enhancing teacher skills, increasing their knowledge base, as well as helping them to keep up with current best practices. In the end, educators will be skilled with prevention and intervention strategies that are non-militant, but effective.

5.4. Strengthening Of Guidance And Counselling Services:

The findings of the study have revealed that most students (male and female) were exposed to aggressive media, to an aggressive environment both at home and in school and to a violent or else hyper-critical family setup that had a negative impact on their needs and vision. A possible explanation for this state of affairs is that both parents and students view problems and situations differently on account of the generation gap. The Ministry of Education should strengthen guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Kenya with a view to ensuring greater bonding between students, teachers and parents, as well as assisting students to understand themselves and their world so that they can fulfil their potential.

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