

The Phenomenon of Student Violence in the Context of Student Unrest in Kenyan Secondary Schools

Francis Likoye Malenya

Abstract

There have been perennial occurrences of student unrest often resulting in frequent destruction of school property and loss of life despite the various efforts made to address this phenomenon. This study was designed to investigate the fundamental causes of this phenomenon and make recommendations on how to address it. Using data on student violence from the MoE, media reports and the lived experiences of some students, teachers and school administrators in 5 of the former 8 provinces in Kenya, the study carried out critical reflections within an existentialist paradigm. Accordingly, the students were addressed as conscious individuals continually searching for who they are through their actions in (school) life and making choices based on their experiences, values and outlook. Using a combination of conceptual analysis, phenomenological/experiential analysis and the dialectical approach, the study established four features which are necessary but not sufficient in fully expressing an act of student violence namely; intentionality, force, resulting in some bodily harm/injury or violation and finally, implication of some moral responsibility on the part of the perpetrators of acts of violence. Experiential analysis traced and located students' discontent that often leads to violence within the experiences of compromised dignity, fear, anxiety, frustration, intimidation, dread, hopelessness and absurdity on the part of the students. Accordingly, student violence was interpreted as consisting in the actions initiated by students and through which they seek to avoid these unbearable experiences. Viewed from the perspective of existential phenomenologists' view of human nature, the study deductively identified three fundamental causes of student violence thus: the alienation of the students from their process of self-determination, the absurdity of the students' conditions of existence and the affront to students' values and freedom, all which constitute a process of dehumanization. It was therefore argued that the solution to this dehumanization lies in the liberation of not only the students as the oppressed but also the school administrators, teachers and other stakeholders as oppressors, in an effort that engenders a process of humanization. Accordingly, the study recommends that any efforts in addressing student violence in secondary schools in Kenya must necessarily, first; make reference to students' established, lived experiences, secondly, entail the resolution of the students' oppressor-oppressed contradiction and finally, aim at the conscientization of students on the nature of freedom.

Full text: <https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/handle/123456789/12100>