

Influence of Leaders' Collaboration and Empowerment on Resilience to Violent Extremism among Boys' Secondary Schools in the North Eastern Counties of Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess the influence of leaders' collaboration and empowerment on resilience to violent extremism among boys' secondary schools in the north eastern counties of Kenya. The study utilized a cross-sectional approach that collated both qualitative and quantitative data to meet the purposes of the study. The large study sample included 5,870 male secondary school learners, 18 Directors of Education, 18 Deputy County Commissioners (DCCs), and 108 school administrators spread across Garissa, Wajir, and Mandera counties. To obtain 375 study subjects, stratification and simple random methods were used on the entire population. A pre-test study was conducted in Lamu County. SPSS version 26.0 was used for purposes of analysis. The quantitative data was examined through statistical description methods incorporating frequencies, percentages, and table representation. Moreover, correlation examined cross-relationships between study variables. On the other hand, qualitative data was examined through thematic analysis, thus ensuring its alignment with research objectives. The study reveals strong student-school leader collaboration on safety and peace, fostering trust, open dialogue, and student empowerment. While schools promote resilience against extremism, gaps remain in mentorship, unity-focused activities, and community partnerships. Interview respondents recommend institutionalizing student engagement and multi-stakeholder collaboration for stronger preventive frameworks. The findings affirm that leaders who practice collaboration and empowerment foster a collective sense of ownership in the fight against violent extremism. Empowered staff members and students are more alert, proactive, and engaged in maintaining the safety and unity of the school environment. By involving staff in decision-making and sharing responsibility, school leaders build a culture of shared leadership and vigilance. School leadership should prioritize collaboration and empowerment by creating opportunities for teachers and students to take part in decision-making processes. Training and development programs that emphasize collaborative skills, teamwork, and shared responsibility should be implemented.

Keywords: *Leaders' Collaboration and Empowerment, Resilience to Violent Extremism, Boys' Secondary Schools, North Eastern Counties, Kenya.*

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1. Introduction

Inclusive leadership plays a crucial role in mitigating the influence of violent extremism in schools. Americas. In Brazil, inclusive leadership has gained attention in both educational institutions and corporations, where leaders focus on developing policies that embrace diversity in the workplace and schools, leading to a reduction in discriminatory practices (Silva & Costa, 2021). The emphasis on inclusion not only improves the overall environment but also builds resilience among minority groups. Similarly, in Canada, inclusive leadership has contributed to the strengthening of peer support networks, offering marginalized students alternatives to extremist ideologies (Eldor et al., 2022). These examples demonstrate that inclusive leadership in the Americas is pivotal for fostering inclusive communities that promote social cohesion and counteract exclusionary practices. In France, schools have adopted inclusive leadership models that encourage civic education and the integration of democratic values through teacher-led initiatives, fostering greater student engagement and resilience against extremist ideologies (Dubois & Martin, 2020).

In Egypt, Hassan and El-Badry (2020) demonstrated that promoting religious tolerance and strong institutional support played a key role in countering extremist ideologies. These efforts indicate that inclusive leadership is a fundamental strategy for social cohesion and resilience in Africa, helping to counter radicalization and promote sustainable peace. In Tanzania, Moshi and Juma (2021) emphasized the importance of peace education and inclusive school leadership in preventing radicalization. In Somalia, community-based educational programs led by inclusive school administrators have been successful in promoting social cohesion and critical thinking, which countered the appeal of extremist groups (Hassan & Mohamed, 2020). These examples show that in East Africa, inclusive leadership not only promotes diversity but also offers an essential framework for combating the spread of violent extremism in vulnerable communities.

In Kenya, inclusive leadership has played a significant role in reducing vulnerability to violent extremism, particularly in schools and community institutions. Ngugi and Wekesa (2021) found that inclusive leadership, characterized by participatory decision-making and equitable treatment, helped lower the incidence of extremist ideologies in schools. Similarly, Mutunga and Otieno (2022) demonstrated that perceived organizational support, such as mentorship programs, significantly enhanced students' sense of belonging, thereby reducing radicalization tendencies. Kenya's educational and community-based leadership practices focus on creating environments of trust, equity, and inclusivity, which act as buffers against the influences of extremist groups. These practices have been vital in creating a cohesive society, where individuals from different backgrounds feel valued and supported. In the northeastern region of Kenya, community-led initiatives focusing on mentorship and psychosocial support have been shown to strengthen resilience against radicalization, offering alternative narratives to youth susceptible to extremist ideologies. These leadership practices are key to enhancing social cohesion and preventing the spread of violent extremism in the region, where local dynamics are particularly susceptible to destabilization.

1.1 Problem Statement

Although models of effective school leadership in other parts of Kenya demonstrate that collaborative and empowering practices lead to improved student engagement, resilience, and academic performance (Mukonyi, 2020), many schools in the north-eastern counties fall short. Reports highlight the lack of participatory leadership, weak school-community relations, and underdeveloped mechanisms for empowering students and staff (Koech, 2021). These gaps

contribute to increased school dropout rates, learning disruptions, and the gradual erosion of safe learning environments. Violent extremism continues to infiltrate schools, undermining not only education but also community stability and national security.

This study seeks to address this critical gap by examining the influence of leaders' collaboration and empowerment on the resilience of students to violent extremism in boys' secondary schools in North Eastern Kenya. Understanding how leadership practices contribute to or mitigate susceptibility to radicalization is essential for informing future interventions and strengthening school-based prevention strategies in high-risk regions.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

To assess the influence of leaders' collaboration and empowerment on resilience to violent extremism among boys' secondary schools in the north-eastern counties of Kenya.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

H₀1: Leadership collaboration and empowerment have no significant influence on resilience to violent extremism among boys' secondary schools in the north-eastern counties of Kenya

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

Transformational Leadership Theory, originally conceptualized by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985), portrays leadership as a dynamic force that empowers and energizes individuals, encouraging them to rise above personal interests in pursuit of a collective vision that benefits both the organization and society at large. The theory suggests that transformational leaders create profound change by fostering trust, inspiring commitment, and developing individuals' potential within a group. Unlike transactional leadership, which emphasizes rewards and punishments, transformational leadership nurtures innovation, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This approach has been widely applied in various organizational settings, including education, business, and social institutions, to explain how leaders influence individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and resilience in challenging environments. In education, transformational leadership is especially relevant as school leaders play a crucial role in shaping students' values, attitudes, and behaviors (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

2.2 Empirical Review

Azmeraw et al. (2024) explored transformative pedagogy for peace and resilience and how leadership strategies influence students' resistance to radicalization. The study used a quasi-experimental design to test leadership-driven interventions in educational settings, finding that school leadership fostering collaborative learning and student-led peace initiatives significantly enhances resilience against violent extremism. However, the study focuses primarily on pedagogy and does not deeply explore the role of decision-making and joint problem-solving among institutional leaders.

Gogogwute & Musa (2024) examined collaborative security strategies employed by the Nigerian Armed Forces in countering violent extremism. Using a mixed-methods approach, findings indicated that joint military-civilian decision-making, inter-agency coordination, and community-driven security initiatives improve counter-extremism outcomes. However, the study does not assess the long-term sustainability of such collaborative strategies beyond government interventions.

Kanu et al. (2024) explored the role of education in countering Boko Haram's influence in Northeast Nigeria, emphasizing the importance of school leadership in resilience-building. Using longitudinal data, the study found that collaborative school leadership efforts, including mentorship programs and joint curriculum development, significantly deter extremist influence on students. However, a gap exists in understanding how leadership empowerment directly contributes to school-wide counter-extremism success.

Ari (2024) conducted a case study on women leaders in peacebuilding efforts in Plateau State, Nigeria, analyzing how collaborative leadership and community engagement initiatives reduce radicalization risks. The study highlighted that female leaders play a crucial role in conflict mediation and problem-solving, creating grassroots networks that strengthen resilience. However, the research does not evaluate the frequency and effectiveness of communication between these leaders and youth populations at risk of radicalization.

Mesok (2022) examined counterinsurgency and community participation in Kenya's counter-extremism efforts, revealing that collaborative decision-making between security forces and local leaders significantly enhances intervention success. The study used policy analysis and interviews to demonstrate that joint problem-solving fosters community trust, reducing susceptibility to extremist recruitment. However, the study lacks a quantitative assessment of how collaborative leadership directly impacts long-term resilience-building.

3. Methodology

The study utilized a cross-sectional approach that collated both qualitative and quantitative data to meet the purposes of the study. The large study sample included 5,870 male secondary school learners, 18 Directors of Education, 18 Deputy County Commissioners (DCCs), and 108 school administrators spread across Garissa, Wajir, and Mandera counties. To obtain 375 study subjects, stratification and simple random methods were used on the entire population. A purposive sampling method was also used to find DCCs, sub-county education directors, and school administrators in the above-mentioned three counties. The study utilized questionnaires and structured interviews as its main data collection methodologies. The major data collection method was through self-administered instruments, which included surveying the students with questionnaires and interviewing educational directors, DCCs, and school administrators. A pre-test study was conducted in Lamu County, whereby 38 learners, 2 Directors of Education, 2 Deputy County Commissioners (DCCs), and 11 school administrators, which was 10% of the sample size. Following the data collection process, the accumulated data were critically examined to evaluate their comprehensiveness before encoding and feeding it into SPSS version 26.0 for purposes of analysis. The examination involved both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The quantitative data were examined through statistical description methods incorporating frequencies, percentages, and table representation. Moreover, correlation examined cross-relationships between study variables. On the other hand, qualitative data was examined through thematic analysis, thus ensuring its alignment with the research objectives.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

The study sampled 375 learners, 18 Directors of Education, 18 Deputy County Commissioners (DCCs), and 108 school administrators spread across Garissa, Wajir, and Mandera counties. The learners were issued the questionnaires while the other respondents were interviewed. The Table provides the response rates.

Table 1: Response Rate

Respondents	Sampled	Response	Percentage
Directors of Education	18	18	
Deputy County Commissioners	18	18	
School Administrators	108	108	
Learners	375	375	
Total	519	519	100%

As per Table 1, the study obtained a 100% response rate from all categories of the respondents. This was in agreement with Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), who indicated that as long as the responses were above 70%, they were considered excellent. Therefore, the response rate of 100% indicates excellent results.

4.2 Reliability Results

The study conducted a pre-test study in Lamu County, and the outcome is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability Results

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha
Leadership Openness and Accessibility	0.822
Violent Extremism	0.921
Average	0.859

According to Table 2, the average Cronbach Alpha coefficient was 0.872, which was more than 0.7. This is in accordance with Creswell and Plano (2018) who revealed that coefficients from 0.7 to 1 indicate that the instruments are highly reliable.

4.3 Leaders' Collaboration and Empowerment

This section aims to understand the participatory nature of leadership in school environments and how that influences students' attitudes and resistance to extremist ideologies. The responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The findings were analyzed and summarized on Table 3.

Table 3: Leaders' Collaboration and Empowerment

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
School leaders (teachers, principals, and community leaders) communicate regularly about the dangers of violent extremism.	375	4.475	0.614
I feel comfortable discussing security and safety concerns with my school leaders.	375	4.383	0.867
School leaders provide timely and clear information on how to avoid radical influences.	375	4.241	0.939
There is an open and respectful dialogue between students and school leaders on issues affecting our community.	375	4.604	0.712
I receive guidance from school leaders on making safe and informed choices regarding extremist influences.	375	4.184	0.698
School leaders involve students in discussions about security and community safety.	375	4.522	0.762
My opinions are valued when discussing ways to prevent violent extremism in school	375	4.241	0.685
Students and school leaders work together to identify and address security concerns.	375	4.487	0.830
School leaders encourage student-led initiatives that promote peace and tolerance.	375	4.506	0.674
I feel empowered to contribute ideas and solutions to prevent violent extremism in my school.	375	4.266	0.788
My school organizes activities that promote unity and discourage violence.	375	4.003	0.732
Leaders in my school work together with parents and the community to create a safe learning environment.	375	4.275	0.625
There are mentorship programs where older students or teachers guide younger students to resist radical influences.	375	3.937	0.814
Our school collaborates with religious and community leaders to teach peace and coexistence.	375	3.896	0.694
I have participated in events or programs designed to build resilience against violent extremism.	375	4.067	0.755

Based on the study findings, respondents strongly agreed that there is an open and respectful dialogue between students and school leaders on issues affecting the community (Mean = 4.604, Std. Deviation = 0.712). This suggests a high level of trust and open communication in schools, which is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment where students feel heard and

respected. Similarly, respondents strongly agreed that school leaders involve students in discussions about security and community safety (Mean = 4.522, Std. Deviation = 0.762), indicating participatory leadership practices that empower students to take part in shaping their school environment and resilience strategies.

Participants also agreed that school leaders encourage student-led initiatives that promote peace and tolerance (Mean = 4.506, Std. Deviation = 0.674), reflecting efforts to nurture leadership and active citizenship among students. This aligns with the broader goal of building student agency in preventing violent extremism. Furthermore, respondents agreed that students and school leaders work together to identify and address security concerns (Mean = 4.487, Std. Deviation = 0.830), pointing to a collaborative culture where both parties share responsibility for school safety.

Respondents affirmed that school leaders regularly communicate about the dangers of violent extremism (Mean = 4.475, Std. Deviation = 0.614), indicating proactive engagement by leaders to inform and protect students against radical influences. The statement “I feel comfortable discussing security and safety concerns with my school leaders” also received high agreement (Mean = 4.383, Std. Deviation = 0.867), suggesting strong relational dynamics between students and school leaders, which is key for early detection and prevention of extremist threats.

Respondents agreed that leaders provide timely and clear information on how to avoid radical influences (Mean = 4.241, Std. Deviation = 0.939) and that their opinions are valued when discussing ways to prevent violent extremism in school (Mean = 4.241, Std. Deviation = 0.685), highlighting both the clarity of communication and the importance placed on student input.

Likewise, students felt empowered to contribute ideas and solutions to prevent violent extremism (Mean = 4.266, Std. Deviation = 0.788), showing that schools are cultivating a sense of agency and responsibility in their students. Respondents also acknowledged that leaders work with parents and the community to create a safe learning environment (Mean = 4.275, Std. Deviation = 0.625), underlining the collaborative effort between schools and external stakeholders to foster safety and peace.

In addition, respondents agreed that they receive guidance from school leaders on making safe and informed choices regarding extremist influences (Mean = 4.184, Std. Deviation = 0.698) and have participated in events or programs designed to build resilience against violent extremism (Mean = 4.067, Std. Deviation = 0.755), demonstrating efforts to build students’ awareness and resilience through both leadership and programming.

However, relatively lower mean scores were observed in statements about school organizing activities that promote unity and discourage violence (Mean = 4.003, Std. Deviation = 0.732), mentorship programs for resisting radical influences (Mean = 3.937, Std. Deviation = 0.814), and collaboration with religious and community leaders to teach peace and coexistence (Mean = 3.896, Std. Deviation = 0.694). These areas suggest room for strengthening school-community linkages and structured peer-support systems to further support student resilience.

The findings indicate that schools have largely fostered a culture of collaboration and empowerment, with strong support for student involvement in discussions about peace and security. Nonetheless, increased efforts in community partnerships, mentorship programs, and unity-promoting school activities could enhance the resilience framework against violent extremism even further.

In addition, a sub-county director of education emphasized that leadership collaboration and empowerment thrive where school administrators deliberately create platforms for student involvement beyond the classroom. He pointed out that,

“In several schools, peace clubs and student councils were instrumental in facilitating dialogue between learners and administrators on matters of community safety and radicalization risks. These structures not only foster student voice but also build a shared sense of responsibility, with learners proposing actionable ideas such as peer-awareness campaigns and safe reporting mechanisms.”

A school principal from one of the participating schools echoed this sentiment, stating that,

“When students feel valued in decision-making processes, they develop a heightened sense of ownership and become more alert to early signs of extremist behavior, often acting as the first line of detection in school environments.”

Moreover, a Deputy County Commissioner (DCC) highlighted the importance of inter-agency collaboration, noting that in schools where leadership is open to engaging external actors—including religious leaders and community elders—students benefit from a multi-dimensional support system. The DCC stressed that,

“Such collaborations allow students to receive holistic mentorship and resilience training that extends beyond academic spaces. However, in some schools, these partnerships were either ad hoc or underutilized due to limited administrative initiative or resource constraints. I would therefore recommend that schools institutionalize mentorship programs and establish routine dialogues with parents and local influencers, ensuring that empowerment is not just a leadership philosophy but an embedded practice in school-community safety strategies.”

4.4 Experience of Collaboration in Preventing Violent Extremism

Respondents were asked to indicate specific instances where school leaders worked together with students or community members to prevent violent extremism. Many respondents described positive experiences involving joint initiatives, such as peace clubs, dialogue forums, or community outreach programs. These accounts demonstrate how collaborative leadership fosters a shared responsibility for security and promotes a culture of peace within the school environment. The involvement of multiple stakeholders, including parents and religious leaders, was noted as strengthening the school’s resilience against extremist influences.

However, some respondents indicated limited or no experience with such collaboration, highlighting potential gaps in communication and community engagement. These responses suggest that in some schools, collaboration efforts may be insufficiently visible or inclusive, which could undermine students’ sense of empowerment and collective efficacy in combating extremism. The findings underscore the importance of enhancing participatory approaches that actively involve students and community partners in security and resilience-building efforts.

4.4.1 Suggestions for Empowering Students against Radical Influences

Respondents were asked to indicate ideas on how school leaders could further empower students to resist radical influences and support peaceful coexistence. Common suggestions included increasing student-led activities, providing more mentorship programs, and creating safe spaces for open discussions about extremist threats. Many respondents emphasized the need for continuous education on critical thinking, conflict resolution, and intercultural understanding to equip students with practical skills to counter radical narratives.

Other responses called for stronger partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations to reinforce these efforts beyond the classroom. Some students also highlighted the importance of recognizing and valuing their contributions, which can boost motivation and ownership in peacebuilding initiatives. These qualitative insights highlight the potential for schools to develop more comprehensive empowerment strategies that nurture proactive, resilient learners capable of rejecting violent extremism.

4.5 Pearson Correlation of Leaders’ Collaboration and Empowerment and Resilience to Violent Extremism

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of the linear relationships between leaders’ collaboration and empowerment and resilience to violent extremism.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation of Leaders’ Collaboration and Empowerment and Resilience to Violent Extremism

		Resilience to Violent Extremism	Leaders’ Collaboration and Empowerment
Resilience Violent Extremism	Pearson Correlation	1	.594**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.01
	N	375	375
Leaders’ Collaboration and Empowerment	Pearson Correlation	.594**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.01	
	N	375	375

**.

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis indicate significant positive relationships between leaders’ collaboration and empowerment and resilience to violent extremism. Leaders’ collaboration and empowerment have a strong and significant positive correlation with resilience to violent extremism ($r = 0.594$, $p < 0.01$).

4.6 Summary

The study reveals strong student-school leader collaboration on safety and peace, fostering trust, open dialogue, and student empowerment. While schools promote resilience against extremism, gaps remain in mentorship, unity-focused activities, and community partnerships. Interview respondents recommend institutionalizing student engagement and multi-stakeholder collaboration for stronger preventive frameworks.

5. Conclusion

The findings affirm that leaders who practice collaboration and empowerment foster a collective sense of ownership in the fight against violent extremism. Empowered staff members and students are more alert, proactive, and engaged in maintaining the safety and unity of the

school environment. By involving staff in decision-making and sharing responsibility, school leaders build a culture of shared leadership and vigilance. Therefore, collaborative leadership is essential not only for strengthening school operations but also for building social resilience against extremist threats.

6. Recommendations

School leadership should prioritize collaboration and empowerment by creating opportunities for teachers and students to take part in decision-making processes. Training and development programs that emphasize collaborative skills, teamwork, and shared responsibility should be implemented. By empowering staff and students, school leaders can create a more resilient school community that collectively works towards countering extremism. Regular workshops and peer-led initiatives could promote a shared vision of resilience and strengthen the school's defense against extremist ideologies.

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