

School Leaders in Cameroon: Managing School Crisis

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Abstract: School crisis has become recurrent in Cameroon schools especially at the secondary school sector. This actuality needs prompt response. Leaders in schools are not trained crisis managers and to work well and achieve better results in times of crisis, needs planned actions set aside to preempt any eventual crisis in our schools. This paper aims at understanding what crisis in schools mean and provide information that will go a long way to arm school leaders as they run schools not knowing when a crisis may struck. In the context of Cameroon, crisis occur abruptly and find school administrators helpless and unprepared to handle them whereas it is a phenomenon that needs preparedness and planning. To provide accurate information to make this work apt , secondary data on crisis management were sort and analyzed. The pertinence of this paper lie on the need for school leaders to have mastery of what crisis management in schools entail and what can be done to be ever ready to handle a crisis in schools.

Key Words: School Leaders, Managing School Crisis, Cameroon.

INTRODUCTION

It is of necessity to look at school management when there is abnormality. Specifically, during a crisis situation such as when a pupil or student or teacher or school administrator is killed in school, massive malaise of students leading to commotion and disorder in school, a natural disaster hit the school, an epidemic or pandemic like the recent world-wide COVID-19 , drug consumption by students and staff, the Bokoharam crisis in the far north and of course the socio-economic crisis in the north west and south west regions of Cameroon. “Crisis situations disrupt routinized patterns , create an atmosphere of ambiguity, and cause leadership uncertainty” (Scot, 2017). Due to the fact that school leaders are not trained to handle school crisis, leaders inadvertently misstep in their crisis response hence complicating the situation and prolonging the recovery. In a phd research titled “leading during a crisis: are school leaders prepared?” the research student Carol Young wondered aloud if school leaders have perfect knowledge of running schools in times of crisis and propose special training for school leaders through in-service training and also through pre-service training for school leaders appointed and lack the required crisis management skills. In another work titled “ school management crisis plan: a preemptive mission in schools by Takang , (2021) the researcher als reveal that school leaders are not trained crisis managers and to work well and achieve better results in times of crisis , needs planned actions set aside to preempt any eventual crisis in our schools.

Lori, (2010) in the university of San Diego writes on : “choices for school administration when crisis hits”. Lori says school leaders carry great responsibility when a crisis occurs. Understanding the significance and use of school crisis teams is virtually important and often unknowingly overlooked says Lori.

REVIEW OF SOME CRISIS IN CAMEROON SCHOOLS

AMOS (2019), Writing for Africa argument acknowledge the fact that for years now, students and teachers in the Anglophone regions have been prevented from going to school as a result of deadly socio-political crisis hitting the north west and south west regions of Cameroon. “things were not always this way. The streets around Ayaba hotel used to be flooded with school children at this time

of the day, but things have changed since the Anglophone crisis escalated into an armed conflict a couple of years ago. Now, every Monday is a “ghost town” in Cameroon’s two English speaking region. Schools all remain closed for the day. Moreover, education facilities are under a permanent boycott with teachers and students barred from going to school”.

In another outing, Relief web.Int (2018) posted an article titled “teachers murdered and schools attacked by rebels in cameroon”. Developing the story, it emphasize that three teachers were killed in a week and at least 30 schools have been targeted this year (2018) by armed separatists in the country’s English –speaking regions. “a school principal is also missing and at least 30 schools have been the target of violence by separatist rebels” quoted relief web.int.

On the 13th January 2020 a 4eme (form 3) student ; 15 years old at government high school Nkolbison in Yaounde stab his mathematics teacher by name Tchakounte Maurice to death during his lesson as the teacher tried sending out the student from his class because of previous acts of disrespect. After attempts of hitting the teacher which was not successful, the student pulled out a weapon which the mates say was a knife and stabbed his mathematics teacher with. Panic and fear gripped the classroom students screamed in fright calling the attention of other teachers. In an attempt to rescue the situation, the teacher was quickly transported to the yaounde teaching hospital but it was too late.

In another scandal on the 29th of march 2019, students and teachers at the government bilingual high school deido duoala were in total consternation following the stabbing to death of rochman Bleriot a form five student. According to Bruno ndonwie reporting, students who witnessed the incident recount that on this day of the second term, a squable amongst a group of students broke out, the scene suddenly turned violent as some students resisted handing their phones to the bullies who forcefully requested them. Bleriot, the victim, came in to protect his friend and got tabbed by one of the bullies. The victim Bleriot was rushed to the deido district hospital where he died soon after.

Evidently, we see school crisis in practice ; not forgetting COVID-19 which took all school stakeholders wanting. There is therefore the need for the Cameroonian school system to guard against any school crisis; developing strategies on how to manage any crisis .

VITAL INFORMATION REGARDING CRISIS MANAGEMENT NEEDED BY SCHOOL LEADERS

School leaders are expected to be conversant with : Crisis management planning. To understand this better, the following shall be looked at: 1. Definitions 2. Crisis management plan 3. crisis management team 4. Crisis management inservice. It is worth, mentioning that these crisis management concepts was put forth by Virginia department of education, division of special education and student services in 2002.

1. Definitions

- “crisis” shall include but not be limited situations involving the death of a student, staff member, or a member of a situation’s immediate family by suicide, substance abuse, illness, or accident. The principals shall have the authority to determine what is a crisis incident and to convene the crisis management team.
- “critical incident” shall include situations involving threats of harm to students, personnel, or facilities. critical incidents include but are not limited to natural disasters, fire, use of weapons/explosives, and the taking of hostages. Such incidents require an interagency response involving law enforcement and/or emergency agencies.
- the individual school “crisis management plan” shall be a written plan with explicit intent to protect and sustain life, reduce emotional trauma, assist in emotional recovery from trauma, and minimize personal injury and/or damage to the facility.

2. Crisis management plan: crisis management plan include provisions for pre-planning , intervention/response, and post-emergency activities, including the establishment or designation of the following :

- explicit procedure for each crisis incident;
- crisis headquarters and command post outside the school facility in the event evacuation is necessary;
- chain of command in the event a key administrator is not available;
- spokesperson to the media. This person will be the principal or designee and is responsible for gathering and confirming all pertinent information about the incident and for informing the school division's public information officer prior to media release.

3. crisis management team : school crisis management team shall be established at schools to meet the demands of the crisis incidents.

- membership; the crisis management team shall consist of an immediately accessible core group who have the knowledge and skills to act in any emergency and shall include the principal, assistant principal, one or more guidance counselors, nurse/clinic attendant, school psychologist, school social worker, one or more selected teachers, and a person to record events / minutes of meetings .Additionally , the police department (school resource officer) mental health services, fire department shall be asked to consult with the school team. A roster of team members will be posted in each school administration office.
- purposes; the crisis team shall implement and adapt appropriate action from the crisis management plan to address the specific events of the crisis . roles and responsibilities of team members and consultants will be established in the school's written crisis management plan.

4 crisis management in service : this entails that the crisis management plan shall be reviewed annually with the full school staff and shared with all transient staff, nurse/clinic attendants, secretaries, cafeteria staff , custodians and bus drivers.

WAY FORWARD

From observations in the Cameroon context, teacher training institutions should have courses in crisis management and planning.

A crisis intervention plan should be put in place and incorporate the 3R'S : readiness, response and recovery. School personnel to effectively respond to students' needs in a time of crisis.

As clearly enumerated above school leaders should put all on board in the crisis management team and have a strategic plan on this regard.

For continuity, in order to support learning and growth, after a crisis, school leaders should evaluate what has worked , decide what to retain or develop, and ensure successful practices.

School leaders should establish comprehensive school crisis response plans. It is critical to have crisis plans for multiple crisis situations with clearly defined roles for each; plan for an epidemic or pandemic; plan for student riot; plan for student-teacher attack etc , etc.

Crisis management has not received sufficient attention from school leadership/teacher preparation programs. It is necessary for the curriculum regarding teacher/school leadership be reorganized emphasizing school crisis management.

The use of school crisis teams is vitally important and often unknowingly overlooked whereas is an inevitable aspect in recent years in school milieu. Special attention be given to this by education authorities .

To place more emphasise on the crisis management aspect, legislation be passed to that effect.

An aspect which is perfect is focusing on intelligence gathered 10 strong points ring focusing on getting relevant information which can prevent a crisis. The crisis management planning can plan effectively taking this into account.

Technology can effectively be used to put occurrence of school crisis under control. Control cameras can be used to monitor all activities in school environment and be able to stop any planned activity that can lead to a crisis.

National pta , celebrating 125 years elucidated some strong points on how parents can prevent violence in schools. They include: communicating effectively with their children asking open-ended questions such as “tell me more”, “what do you think?” start important discussions with your children-about violence, smoking, drugs , sex, drinking. Don’t wait for your children or teens to come to you, setting clear rules and limits for your children ,know the warning signs emanating from your children, stay involved in your child’s school, join a local pta or a violence prevention coalition, help to organize a community violence prevention forum, help develop a school violence prevention and response plan , and work to influence lawmakers.

CONCLUSION

Crisis have become very recurrent in our schools and as such , running schools need to follow different paradym . The contemporary schools at all levels is witnessing serious change in terms of comportment of learners, teachers and even administrators who do things unusually warranting the necessity to plan to counteract certain deviant behavior. This is why crisis management plan is now imperative in our schools. All stakeholders and community is called upon to strengthen this effort if not our schools will just become an avenue for inculcating attitudes and beliefs that will destroy our national unity , economy and integration.

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