

**COMMUNICATING SOCIAL ISSUES THROUGH GRAFFITI IN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED SCHOOLS IN
WEST POKOT COUNTY, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

Graffiti assume the form of written language or drawings on surfaces in public places. Their authorship is private and writers are anonymous. They are often viewed as illegal. Graffiti are however a form of public communication. Their authors who are usually denied other channels of communication use them as avenues for self-expression and to pass messages across on real-life issues affecting them. Students in secondary schools in Kenya are one such group that use graffiti to express their opinions. Since they do not always enjoy the privilege of making decisions or taking part in discussions on matters affecting them directly and indirectly, they fall back on graffiti as an alternative medium of communication within their places of residence-schools. It is not clear how the majority of students in schools express their feelings to authorities about their circumstances at school although there is evidence of persistent graffiti writing in many secondary schools in Kenya. Is it possible that since students may have limited ways of expressing their issues to the school administration, they would resort to the use of graffiti that is pervasive in schools? This study therefore attempted to investigate the use of graffiti by students in secondary schools as a communication strategy to bring out the issues that affect them in schools. Specifically, the study sought to: identify and describe types of graffiti found in secondary schools; describe stylistic features of graffiti found in secondary schools; determine the social issues communicated by graffiti in secondary schools; and establish the different attitudes towards graffiti by both students and teachers in secondary schools. The study was guided by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Norman Fairclough and Geoffrey Leech's Model of Stylistic Analysis. A sampling frame of the schools was constructed from the four divisions in West Pokot County namely: Kapenguri, Chepareria, Lelan and Riwo. Ten schools out of approximately fifty schools in the county chosen were selected from each division. Graffiti texts were collected in these ten secondary schools that were purposively sampled. Out of these, one hundred texts, ten from each school, were sampled for analysis. Fifty students and twenty teachers from these schools were randomly selected and interviewed using different interview schedules and their responses recorded on audio tapes. The data collected was analysed and presented in tables. The data was mainly analysed qualitatively, although some quantitative data was used for simple percentages to arrive at inferences and conclusions. The findings were that there are different perceptions towards graffiti by both students and teachers in secondary schools. Graffiti also used unique stylistic devices such as repetition, short word forms, use of nicknames and slogans among others. The findings of this research may be beneficial to the head teachers, quality assurance and standard officers, students' counsellors, policy makers and other stakeholders who will gain knowledge on the meaning of graffiti which they will use to understand the students and why they use graffiti to express their opinions in their schools. Classroom teachers may also use graffiti to establish the unspoken students' problems and behaviour and thus prevent indiscipline cases arising in their schools. It is also relevant and useful to the study of linguistics in general and particularly to the field of Stylistics, Discourse studies and Sociolinguistics by giving an analysis of language use in society.