An Assessment of Peer Counsellor's Selection and Training on Students' Discipline in High Schools

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Abstract

Peer counselling has been adopted as a significant contributor of behaviour change among students in secondary schools. Peer counselling normally utilizes role playing as well as modelling to enhance discipline among the learners. The purpose of the study is to find out the relationship between criteria used in selection and training of peer counsellors and students' discipline in selected schools in Ainamoi sub county, Kericho County in Kenya. The study adopted mixed methods: descriptive research design which utilized both qualitative and quantitative approach. The study was conducted in four selected high schools in Ainamoi Sub County. Stratified random sampling procedure was used to identify the schools while, purposive sampling procedure was used to select students, Guidance and counselling teachers and also deputy principals. Thus, a sample size of 280 respondents were engaged in this study: The questionnaire and interview schedule were utilized in this study. The findings indicated that selection and training of peer counsellors was done which significantly enhanced discipline in the respective schools (P<0.05). Training and induction were given to peer counsellors through seminars with the help of internal or external counsellors. In addition, character and traits were examined before selection of peer counsellors. The processes of selection of peer counsellors involved the students, teachers as well as the administration. Results on strategies used indicated that discussion and group counselling were the mostly adopted strategies used in promoting discipline in the schools. The study concluded that selection procedure and training of peer counsellors had significant role in improving discipline of students in schools. The study recommends that the school should enhance training and seminar programmes that improve the skills and knowledge of peer counsellors in secondary schools.

Key Words: Selection and Training, Peer Counsellors, Students' Discipline, Descriptive Research Design, Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho County, Kenya.

1. Introduction

Peer counselling program is designed for peer counsellors to offer support services to their peers. The main goal of the program is to be an effective tool for providing prevention, intervention, and referral services to students experiencing difficulties (Bao & Lyubomirsky, 2014). Another purpose is to train and educate students on issues affecting them through peer education, peer mediation and peer counselling. The success of peer counselling is based on the premise that

effectively trained and motivated young people have the ability to positively influence the attitudes and behaviours of their peers (Oyerinde, 2017).

Peer counselling is a program focussing on peers helping peers. The main role of a peer counsellor is to moderate problems within students by helping them to find out their answers in their challenges (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Peer counselling assumes that people who share the same characteristics and age are liable to influence one another's behaviour (Bett, 2013). Peer counselling can be used as a strategy to curb indiscipline in high schools (Osodo *et al.*,2016). Through a unique way of interaction, for instance role playing and modelling, peer counsellors can discuss the students' challenges harmoniously and consequently improve discipline (Marangu *et al.*, 2012). Peer counselling typically addresses change from the individual level by attempting to modify a person's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs or behaviour in the environment and influencing through interaction and action (Taheri *et al.*, 2013).

In global perspective, peer counselling started in USA in the mid-sixties among the handicapped students who were facing learning difficulties at Berkeley University, Kan (1996). The same author further noted that at the university, the students took turns talking about the problems they encountered as others listened and gave their individual opinions. The discussion was done over and over in a relaxed, informal and friendly environment. After a lengthy and sustained practice, the concept process developed and evolved over years. It gradually diffused outside the university and eventually gained acceptance outside the United States. As the concept developed in and outside the United States, more elements like selection, training, assessment and job finding were added. American counsellors therefore, are presently internationally recognized and accepted as professional support therapists (Rew, 2005).

In Africa, indiscipline has plagued many schools leading to series of unrest, destruction of school property, vandalism, sexual abuse, killings and drug abuse (Rue & Byarr, 2015). Masita (2004) also noted that indiscipline in African schools is on high increase. In South Africa, peer support programmes were established in secondary schools to curb high risk behaviours, for instance: HIV and AIDS, substance abuse, violence, destruction of property, and various forms of indiscipline issues (Visser, 2005). The same author further noted that peer counsellors were selected, trained and supported to implement the programs in their schools with the support of their teacher head of guidance and counselling and school administration. The peer counsellors could identify the needs to be addressed and attend to. They could refer the advanced challenges to their helping agents. They also started awareness and information activities in their schools.

It is important that peer counsellors be selected and trained in order to better influence the desired behaviour. In Zimbabwean high school, peer counsellors were selected on the basis of their character but were reported to be lacking in peer counselling training (Chereshe, 2013). The same author further noted that as a result, they encountered resistance and discouragement from students. The teachers wished that the peer counsellors could be trained on peer counselling skills, as well as on the relevant content designed to be covered during counselling sessions in their peer counselling.

Currently a good number of counselling centres have been established across the country to bring the services closer to people (Oketch & Kimenia, 2012). In addition, there has been formation of

associations such as: Kenya Counselling and Psychological Association (KCPA), whose function is, for example, to ensure accountability of practitioners and to regulate and standardize counselling activities in Kenya (Kimiru, 2014). The same author further explains that the Kenya Counselling and Psychological Association (KCPA) concentrates upon young people. It offers professional training in counselling, and hence has increased the number of school counsellors and peer counselling clubs in schools.

In Kenya, deviant behaviours in students in high schools have reached an alarming point. This situation casts a shadow of doubt on the effectiveness of the peer counselling services in Kenyan high schools. The wave of unrest in high schools has reached crisis level. Property worth millions of shillings has been destroyed and, in many institutions, facilities reduced to shells in a short time. In the article by the National Crime Research (2016), on the assessment of arsons in secondary schools, between the months of May to August,2016, over 130 secondary schools in Kenya suffered burning of school infrastructure and also resulted to destruction of school property and loss of lives, as a result of students unrests and violence. The unrest was reportedly due to anxiety over mock exams, discontentment between learners and the administration and lack of free time (Tikoko & Kiprop, 2011; Yuen, & Leung, 2010). However, following such findings, questions arise on the effectiveness of peer counselling to impart moral knowledge, promote responsibility, enhance good behaviours and empower students to adequately contain anxieties.

Peer counselling in high schools in Kericho County is a new field which is currently under the Peer Counselling Association. The Peer Counselling Association has trained the principals, the heads of departments, and the peer counsellors. The peer counsellors were selected from among the other learners in their various schools. The Association has set up its administrative structure as follows: at the school level, the Head of Department (HOD) is the patron; at the sub county level, the Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association (KESSHA) Sub county chair person is the patron; at the county level, the KESSHA Chair person is the patron; and at the National level, the KESSHA Chairperson is the patron (Peer counselling association, 2015).

Ainamoi Sub County, Kericho County, Kenya had its own share of indiscipline cases. Sources from Ainamoi Sub County Education office (2010) indicate that from 2007-2010, over 3 Schools: Kericho High school, Chebigen Secondary and Kipchimchim secondary are among the schools that had major indiscipline cases. A meeting was called on 20th, July 2010 for all the principals and BOG members by the Ainamoi Sub County Education officer to find solution for that trend. The meeting ended with a suggestion that peer counselling clubs be used as a major alternative in containing indiscipline.

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violence can be investigated in the background of peer counselling programmes. Therefore, there is need to find out the relationship between criteria used in selection and training of peer counsellors and students' discipline in selected high schools in Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho county in Kenya.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework of the study was guided by social learning theory as postulated by Albert Bandura (1977). The theory helps to explains how people acquire complex behaviours in a social context. The theory accepts that learning takes place through modelling, by observing the behaviour and imitating. The theory further explains that the learners are influenced by people they are in contact with and the conditions that must be met for learning to take place as the ability to pay attention, the ability to retain what has been observed, the ability to reproduce the behaviour and the motivation to perform the behaviour. It proposes that through observing the role model, the learners are able to pay attention to a model and retain what has been observed which can be retrieved especially if motivated to imitate and do as the model, resulting in a good behaviour as desired in the context. The role of the peer counsellors in this context is to facilitate the learners as they observe them as role models around them (Phares, 1988).

In this study peer counsellors, as they are in contact with the learners, are expected to model the desired behaviours of their fellow colleagues. Students' discipline can be influenced by peer counsellors as role models who can psycho educate the learners in the importance of discipline while the learners should be attentive, retain, reproduce and perform the behaviour as motivated by the peer counsellors (Smykowski, 2018). When learners are inspired by positive role models, they are likely to desire to be achievers who accomplish their goals through hard work and perseverance (Mitchell, 2014). The students are expected to use their role models to get started and be consistent to achieve their goals. Ultimately, they should be able to develop resilience in order to overcome or withstand any challenges whether physical, emotional or mental (Lew, 2019).

Empirical Review

Selection of peer counsellors is paramount in having effective peer counselling club members. The teacher who heads guidance and counselling, together with the school administration are expected to screen the peer counsellors in order to find out if they exhibit right values and disposition that will enable them conduct their counselling duties accurately (American Code of Ethics,2014). The code of ethics further noted that their academic performance, personal relationship with the school administration, teachers and the entire students should be considered during the selection. It further emphasized that Peer counsellors are expected to be trained by professional counsellors by building a good relationship and empowering them, as they are able to assist the peer counsellors to accomplish their counselling services well.

Peer counsellors pass through rigorous screening process to reflect the objectives of the program and to ensure that they are able to handle challenging situations (Garringer & MacRae, 2008). The same authors further noted that the age, duration of peer counsellors in the school, trusted and positive influence towards the students should be considered when choosing the peer counsellors.

They should be ready to commit themselves to the program for the required duration of time. The learners from every class should indicate the names of two students they think they would go for if they had a personal problem (Kamore & Tiego, 2015). The same authors further noted that the learners who will be selected will further be screened to obtain a final list, set for training. The methods of selection of peer counsellors can vary but the qualities of the students appointed should never be compromised to attain success which depends more on personal qualities of the peer counsellors than on the correct use of the specific techniques. Chereshe (2013), in Zimbabwean schools, noted that peer counsellors were selected by teachers on the basis of their character. He further noted that involvement of the learners is also crucial and desirable as the peer counsellors should provide safe and healthy role model for their peers. Peer counsellors should not be eligible to other volunteer or personal development activities as it may amount to burnouts. They should write a brief statement as to why they are interested in being a peer counsellor, life experience that may make them qualify to be a peer counsellor and to be confirmed by the administration.

The teacher counsellor nominates the peer counsellors by asking the learners to select two peer counsellors from every class who are able to help them solve their challenges (Lapan, 2001). The peer counsellors should be nominated by their colleagues and the administration, and be trained in the skills of guidance and counselling (Bett, 2003). It has been noted that young people tend to respect, trust and support peer educators whom they have selected, Kenya Institute of Education, (2004). Karanja and Bowen (2012) seems to concur with Wango (2006) that peer counsellors who receive training are more confident and tend to be more skilful and persuasive as they relate with other students.

The peer counsellors are trained on a wide range of issues such as roommate problems, academic problems, religious issues, alcohol and drug abuse, negative peer pressure, and how to prepare for examinations (Otieno,2018). They are also equipped with different skills and techniques which enable them to build a special relationship with their clients.

Lutomia and Sikolia (2002) emphasized the selection of peer counsellors in high schools as a major key of success in peer counselling programs. They pointed out that selection of peer counsellors should be based on specific qualities such as openness, understanding, good communication, discipline, humility and listening. During the selection of the peer counsellors, each class is to have at least two peer counsellors (Okeyo,2008). The same author further noted that peer counsellors ought to be sociable, disciplined, with average or above average academic performance, must be good listeners and speakers, should be able to keep secrets and should be good role models. Class teachers and the administration should be involved in the selection of peer counsellors

It is important to spend some time training peer counsellors before they start peer counselling activities (Farrel, *et al.*, 2017). The author further noted that the training should provide the peer counsellors with fundamental skills, for instance basic mentoring skills, necessary for making a meaningful impact on their activities. The basic mentoring skills may equip the peer counsellors with empathetic language and positive attitude towards the learners. Training is an important ingredient in peer counselling as they may have time for significant explanation of the program, their role as peer counsellors as well as to practise new skills to be used during the peer counselling sessions (Herrera *et al*, 2008). Peer counsellors should attain adequate training to work effectively

with their peers, however if they encounter issues beyond their abilities they should seek assistance from guidance and counselling teacher.

Assertive training is crucial for counsellors as it will address irrational thoughts and beliefs and show them how they can replace with alternative rational beliefs (Milne, 2011). The same author further noted that knowledge of assertiveness technique is useful to a peer counsellor in helping the learners to look at their behaviour, as they might also desire to replace the undesired behaviour with the desired good habits. Learners with disruptive behaviour can be made to interact with others by creating a context that involves good relationships, fairness, personal interactions, approval, praise and affirmation (Joseph *et al.*, 2010). The learner who adapts a desired behaviour is affirmed and praised. Assertiveness can be used to achieve discipline in learners especially in classroom (Aliakbari, 2015). The same author further noted that assertiveness can be learnt and applied to learners to curb indiscipline.

In Britain and America, it was noted that peer counselling is part of the counselling program (Lapan, 2001). The same author further explained that peer counselling is established and managed by selecting and training peer counsellors on basic counselling skills. The peer counsellors' trainers should consider that the peer counsellors should have three attributes: empathy, genuineness and unconditional positive regard, which help them to build a warm relationship with their clients (Pierce, 2016). The training of peer counsellors may decrease their likelihood of engaging in negative behaviour or causing harm to their peers (Garringer & Macrae, 2008). Peer counsellors who are hoping to be good role models to the learners will be focussed on personal attitudes and feelings towards themselves (Milne, 2008). The same author further noted that peer counsellors need to understand themselves in order to adapt a stance of unconditional positive regard towards the learners as emphasized by person centred therapy. The learners need to feel that they can trust the peer counsellors' integrity in all aspects of their complexities towards their cultures and complexities (Prever, 2011).

The nominated peer counsellors are then trained on basic counselling skills to enable them handle the challenges of the learners (Baek *et al.*, 2015). The same author further noted that peer counsellors need extensive training both before and throughout their work, through different programs focusing their goals, for effective peer counselling. They are expected to improve their self-understanding in order to be effective in their services. Students in high schools have a potential to effectively revolutionize peer counselling activities if trained in peer counselling skills and knowledge (Ndicho, 2005). The same author further noted that if peer counsellors are empowered with trainings, they will be more effective in their activities. The efficiency of peer counsellors can be improved through progressive training in peer counselling skills (Chereshe, 2013). The same author further noted that a harmonized training manual is crucial for adequate peer counselling training to focus on effective outcome in their counselling services.

The training should be planned and should be focussed on the desirable goals of peer counsellors towards the discipline of the learners (Lutomia *et al*, 2002). Training should be based on what peer counsellors need to do to curb discipline in their schools (KIE,2004). This seems to agree with Tiego and Kamore (2015), that if peer counsellors are provided with adequate training, they can be of great help in curbing discipline.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted mixed methods: a descriptive correlation research design was adopted which utilized both qualitative and quantitative approach to examine the relationship of peer counselling programs and students' discipline in selected high schools. The research targeted 4 selected schools from the 22 high schools in the Sub-County. Some of the schools have experienced rioting, tension and even destructions of properties (Sub County education office, 2017). The four selected schools had 2723 students, the Deputy Principals were 4 and teacher Heads of Guidance and counselling were 4. Using stratified sampling technique a sample size consisted of 272 students representing 10% of 2720 was selected comprising of 179 non peer counsellors students and 93 student who were peer counsellors. Purposive sampling procedures was adopted in identifying the four Counselling Heads of Departments and four Deputy Principals making a total sample of 280 respondents. The researcher used two instruments for data collection: The questionnaires were administered to Students which include peer counsellors and regular student, while the interview schedule was used for Teacher Counsellors and Deputy Principals. Also focussed discussion groups (FDGs) was key to gathering information on students. Descriptive analysis including mean and standard deviation was used to enable a meaningful description of the distribution of scores. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used as well as regression analysis where all tests were done at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance. Data furthered presented in tables, pie charts and bar graphs. While interview questions were analysed thematically using content analysis.

4. Results and Discussions

In order to obtain results, descriptive correlation statistics results for selection and training were obtained using mean and standard deviation. The questionnaires used had semi-structured questions with optional answer with a scale ranging from 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Undecided, 2=Disagree and 1=Strongly Disagree which was used to obtain the mean and standard deviation.

Table 1: Students and peer counsellors Responses on Selection and training

	ıimu	m ximı	ım a	n	Deviation
ounsellors are trained by professional	262	2.00	5.00	4.16	.59
e and counselling trainers to undertake					
ling activities					
ounsellors have been provided with	262	2.00	5.00	3.36	1.14
and other counselling materials to					
ke their tasks					
ounsellors are selected on basis of	262	1.00	5.00	2.97	1.04
ic performance					
gh procedures are used for selecting	262	2.00	5.00	3.97	.92
unsellors by the students, class teachers					
ool administration					
unsellors are given enough support from	262	2.00	5.00	4.08	.87
stration to conduct their work.					
d speakers and seminars are developed	262	2.00	5.00	4.02	.88
counsellors to increase experience and					
ore knowledge					

s who join peer counselling are	262	2.00	5.00	4.28	.82
ed based on their discipline records.					
er and traits that fits peer counsellors	262	1.00	5.00	4.06	.98
cted when choosing them.					

According to Table 1 students who joined peer counselling were examined based on their discipline (mean of 4.28). The results also indicated that respondents agreed that peer counsellors were trained by professional guidance and counselling trainers to undertake counselling activities (mean of 4.16). Peer counsellor were found to have enough support from the administration to conduct their work (mean of 4.08). The selection of peer counsellors was influenced by the character and traits of peer counsellor (mean of 4.06). External speakers and seminars were developed for peer counsellors (mean 4.02).

The respondents indicated that thorough procedures were used to moderate extent for selecting peer counsellors by students, class teachers and school administration (mean of 3.97). Furthermore, school provided peer counsellors with books and other counselling materials to undertake their tasks (mean of 3.36). The peer counsellors were selected according to academic performance (mean of 2.97).

Descriptive statistics were used to measure students discipline using mean and standard deviation. These were obtained from answered question that used a scale of 1 to 5 from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Table 4.19: Students and peer counsellors Responses on Students' Discipline

	ıimum	ximum	ean	, Deviation
veness of peer counsellors in2	2.00	5.00	.12	.77
1 solving				
s' response to school rules 2	3.00	5.00	.11	.71
our modification in unruly learners 2	2.00	5.00	.35	.71
e response to the desired behaviour2	2.00	5.00	.77	.73
earners				
s have reduced indiscipline cases 2	3.00	5.00	.19	.62

Table 2 results revealed that peer counselling had reduced indiscipline cases to greater extent (mean of 4.19). The peer counsellors were effective in solving problems to greater extent (mean of 4.12). Result further revealed that students' response to the school rules were positive (mean of 4.11). On the contrary, positive response moderately affected desired behaviours in the learner (mean of 3.77). The respondents showed low effect of peer counsellors in modification of unruly learners (mean of 3.35).

Table 3: Relationship between selection and training of peer counsellors with student's discipline

		ction and Training	lents discipline
on and Training	ı Correlation	1	.234**
	tailed) <i>p</i> -Value		.000
	_	262	262

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s discipline	ı Correlation	.234**	1
	tailed) <i>p</i> -Value	.000	
		262	262

Table 3 reveals that there is a positive relationship between student discipline and peer counsellor's mode of selection and training (P<0.05). Results reveal that the relationship was significant at the 0.01 level, r(262) = 0.234, p<0.01. This indicates that selection and training in peer counselling program positively influence student discipline.

In response to "How are the peer counsellors selected from among the other learners?" Four Deputy principal responded that, "peer counsellors were selected from students who had good reputable character, discipline and hardworking students." We always suggest names to HODs based on judgement of teachers." HOD 1 also concurred with the same where she gets names suggested by teachers. One Deputy principal on the contrary alluded that, "the students are given liberty in their school to join guidance and counselling club". He further said that HOD would be able to vet those who have capability to lead and those who can participate as representative per class." The same point of view was shared by HOD 3. The responds also indicated that students who are student leaders were also involved in guidance and counselling as indicated by HOD 2, HOD3 and Deputy principal 3.

The results indicated that majority of the respondents explained that students who had good reputation both in discipline and performance had higher chances of being selected as peer counsellors. Some of the respondents pointed out that sometimes school prefects body was also included as part of the guidance and counselling. This is because majority of the leaders could play the double roles of peer counselling and also maintaining school order.

The response on the question of training the peer counsellors after selection indicated that all peer counsellors were well trained. HOD 2 revealed that the induction training, where the peer counsellors were introduced to their roles, was necessary. The training was done immediately through and external speakers or otherwise internal speakers in some circumstance. The results indicated that training provided necessary skills, knowledge and understanding of their roles in counselling. This comment was similarly uttered by Deputy Principal 3 as well as HOD 4. Deputy principal 1 responded that, "we always select the peer counsellors with school prefect body". They are then given one training session by taking them to a seminar where both school student management body and peer counsellors are given trainings."

The respondents indicated that there are two methods used in training peer counsellors; these are seminars which is an expensive and best for more exposure and motivation. The other method is internal training within the school with internal or external speakers which had less exposure and less motivation. These methods are informed by financial capability of the school. According to the results, induction training is crucial in provision of basic knowledge and skills to the selected peer counsellors.

Chereshe (2013) concurred with results of this study since he found that peer counsellors were selected on the basis of character of the students. The current study also revealed that the administration considers the students' ability and discipline. Similarly, Lutomia and Sikolia (2002) found that character was important in selecting peer counsellors where some of the attributes of

characters included openness, understanding, good communication, discipline, humility and listening. Karanja and Bowen (2012) also concurred that training assisted in improving the skills and experience of the peer counsellors. They added that it also improved confidence of the peer counsellors in their activities. Similarly, Farrel *et al.*, (2017) agreed that induction training equipped the peer counsellors in conducting their activities.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation Summary

The findings indicated that the students' discipline records were used which influenced the selection and training of peer counsellors. This was followed by the use of professional guidance and counselling resource persons who trains peer counsellors to undertake counselling activities. According to the results, peer counsellors were given sufficient support from administration to conduct their work. The response from Deputy principals and Heads of department (HODs) of guidance and counselling revealed that induction training was mandatory since it improves knowledge and skills of selected peer counsellors, while different schools utilized combination of training from external seminars to training in schools using external or internal guidance and counselling trainers.

The character and traits were examined also while choosing the peer counsellors. The results also indicated that external speakers are usually invited to psycho-educate peer counsellors. In addition, seminars were organised to equip peer counsellors. Furthermore, deputy principals concurred that reputable character, self-discipline and hardworking attributes were considered when selection peer counsellors. Other characteristics which were considered included leadership qualities, ability to solve problems as well as academic performance. Academic progression was not necessarily one of the criteria used while selecting peer counsellors. The results of this study further revealed that the laid down guidelines and procedures were not followed thoroughly while selecting peer counsellors.

Correlation analysis indicated that there was positive relationship between selection and training of peer counsellors and discipline (R=0.234, P<.05). The results were further confirmed by regression model which indicated that selection and training had positive significant influence on students' discipline (t=2.842, P<.05). This showed that there is need to emphasize on selection and training of the peer counsellors for significant improvement of students' discipline.

Conclusions

The study concluded that peer counsellors were selected on basis of discipline, character and traits but not necessarily on academic performance. It implied that character, behaviour and traits are appropriate elements that can be used to choose acceptable peer counsellors. However, the procedures of selection need to be reviewed since it's not thorough for selecting peer counsellors. Training was done by professional guidance and counselling resource persons to equip peer counsellors. Despite support from school administration, peer counsellors did not have sufficient books and peer counselling materials to conduct their activities effectively.

Recommendations

The study recommends that school management should provide sufficient books and counselling material to enable the peer counsellors to improve their skills and knowledge. The selection of peer counsellors should be under strict procedure and rules to enable appropriate peer counsellors to be selected competitively. Thorough laid down procedure and rules would assist the school administration in selection of appropriate peer counsellors. The student emphasizes that there is need for more training and proper procedure in selection of peer counsellors.

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