

Relationship Between Peer Counseling Activities and Pupils' Discipline in Public Primary Schools in Mathioya Sub-county, Murang'a County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Cases of disruptive behavior problems such as inattentiveness, bullying, violence, drug abuse, hitting other pupils, teasing others, yelling and complaining amongst pupils in public primary schools in Mathioya Sub-county are on the rise. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship between peer counseling activities and pupils' discipline in public primary schools. A sample size of 196 respondents were selected. The study established that there was significant relationship between peer counseling activities and pupils' discipline at the $p < 0.05$ [$r = 0.001$, $p = 0.001$]. This indicates that, in public primary schools where teachers frequently engage in peer counseling activities, pupils manifest few cases of indiscipline. The implications of this finding are discussed.

Keywords: Peer counseling activities, pupils' discipline, Mathioya Sub-county

1.0 Introduction

Discipline is an important component of pupils' behavior and without it a school cannot function well towards the achievement of its goals. In the context of a school system, a disciplined pupil is that pupil whose behaviours, actions and inactions conform to the predetermined rules and regulations of the school (Ali, Dada, Isiaka & Salmon, 2014). Cognizant of these assertions, Masitsa (2011) posits that pupils' discipline is widely acknowledged to be essential for creating a positive school climate conducive to sound learning outcomes. Pupils' discipline has highly deteriorated due to decline in moral virtues which are attained through teaching of moral character. According to Lickona (2011), acts of indiscipline among pupils especially at the primary school levels of education is a universal challenge that is facing every school in all parts of the world.

In Italy, Emmanuel, Adom, Josephine and Solomon (2014) found that indiscipline is a multifaceted phenomenon regarding its displays and causes as well as its meanings, management and functions in the social, psychosocial and pedagogical fields. Pupils' discipline in schools is a product of various dynamics found within school and home microsystems. However, the place of peer counseling activities in enhancing pupils' discipline is yet to be fully brought into perspective.

Counseling have been conceived internationally in different ways. Peer counseling is a well-documented concept of counseling. As Stoops, Rafferty and John (2011) point out, it is a personal method of change

and is based on the idea that most people prefer to seek out their peers for help when experiencing challenges, frustrations, concerns and general problems. In other words, when pupils join schools for the first time, some of them experience emotional stress due to a change in the environment as well as behavioral and developmental gaps. As Patterson (2012) states, peer counseling is when students offer counseling services to their peers. Effective school counselors do not offer needs assessment, orientation, information and counseling services on their own. They made maximum use of peer helpers.

In a study carried out in Philadelphia, Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) noted that during the peer counseling or mentoring sessions, individual pupils offer their junior colleagues an opportunity for self-knowledge and self-development through individual or group interventions. Understanding and knowledge of oneself and the environment gained through counseling and mentoring leads to personal development and good decision-making. To corroborate these assertions, Smylie, Conley and Marks (2002), in a study conducted in Chicago, noted that senior pupils act as mentors who provide their young colleagues with a pool of knowledge that could be tapped on, to help polish their disciplinary, behavioral and some particular key skills that were said to be pertinent in career development. Smylie et al (2002) reported that senior pupils help their junior colleagues get involved searching or seeking out for good performers and requesting them to be mentors in given careers. This points to the fact that any junior pupil looking for a mentor is expected to seek out for positive and pleasing behavior patterns and personality, besides a mere successful track record.

Peer mentoring and counseling give pupils an opportunity to work on their issues and concerns without fear and intimidation. Smylie et al (2002) discovered that peer supervision increased in the peer counselors' empathy, respect, genuineness as well as concreteness. Through such skills, a pupil peer counselor is aligned to build a rapport with the peer they are counseling, making it easier to make an impact, and for the client to make sound decisions. This is consistent with the assertions of Bell (2002) who rated peer counseling as an outstanding tool that equips pupil peer counselors with counseling skills and techniques which makes it easier for them to reach their peers but also aid the pupil peer counselors themselves with life skills. Bell (2002) further noted that pupil peer concept provides a practical and economical means to meet the increasing needs of pupils in need of individual help.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, research has indicated that primary schools have embraced the concept of peer counseling as an effective form of counseling (World Bank, 2008). For example, in Botswana, after this realization, the University of Botswana introduced the peer counseling program spearheaded by pupils in 2003 which has produced positive results as reflected in the shared experiences of such pupils. Peer counselors unlike professional counselors are available to help their peers anytime and their counseling sessions are informal discussions and conversations which are not threatening. Peer counseling believes that peers have the ability to reach out and change each other since they understand one another better.

Cognizant of these viewpoints, Sithole (2008), in a study conducted in KwaZulu Natal Province in South Africa, posited that, to this end pupils are expected to build their own databases of prospective pupil mentors and design an action plan for connection. In Kenya and Mathioya Sub-county, cases of indiscipline among pupils in public primary schools pose a great a problem that has persisted over the years. Disruptive behavior problems such as not paying attention, bullying, stealing, violence, drug abuse, teasing other children, fighting, yelling and complaining in primary schools are of special concern to counseling

practitioners and researchers due to their association with later delinquency and school failure. To mitigate these challenges, peer counseling practices have been adopted where members of peer counselors act as peer mentors to new pupils, the peer mentees, in a particular subject, behavior pattern or lifestyle.

A study conducted in Mathioya Sub-county by Kindiki (2009) asserted that establishment of peer counselors was driven by the need of enhancing effective teaching and learning and an even more, the urgent need to tame school unrest within schools in Kenya. Kindiki (2009) noted that pupil leaders are a tremendous help to the school and play a particularly important role in mentoring younger pupils. However, Kindiki (2009) failed to articulate how different peer mentoring activities undertaken by peer counselors have improved school management. In other words, Kindiki (2009) failed to indicate how peer counselors mentoring programmes have impacted on managerial efficiency, pupils’ performance and pupils’ disciplinary patterns. In the same vein, it is not clear which particular skills members of peer counselors ought to possess in order to mentor their colleagues.

2.0 Methods and Procedures

The study adopted mixed methodology and thus applied concurrent triangulation research design. Target population comprised of 58 deputy headteachers (47 male and 11 female) and 599 teachers (294 male and 305 female) all totaling to 657. A total of 196 respondents were selected. A questionnaire was used to collect data from teachers whereas an interview guide was used to collect data from deputy headteachers. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically along the objectives and presented in narrative forms whereas quantitative data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Analysis with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-Version 23) and presented using tables.

3.0 Results

The study sought to establish the extent to which teachers adopt peer counseling activities in public primary schools to promote pupils’ discipline. Results are shown in Table 1;

Table 1: Peer counseling activities and Pupils’ Discipline

			Pupils' discipline		Total
			Indisciplined	Disciplined	
Peer counseling activities	Less peer counseling activities	Count	16	51	67
		% within Peer counseling	23.9%	76.1%	100.0%
	Adequate peer counseling activities	Count	17	78	95
		% within Peer counseling	17.9%	82.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	33	129	162
		% within Peer counseling	20.4%	79.6%	100.0%

Table 1 shows that schools with less peer counseling activities indicated 23.9% indiscipline cases among pupils while disciplined cases were 76.1%. Schools with adequate peer counseling activities had 17.9% cases of indiscipline and 82.1% cases of disciplined cases among pupils. This finding shows that adequate peer counseling activities among pupils reduces cases of indiscipline. Hypothesis was derived from the objective which stated: There is no statistically significant relationship between peer counseling activities and pupils’ discipline in public primary schools in Mathioya Sub-county, Murang’a County, Kenya. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test this hypothesis at 0.05 alpha level. Results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation between Peer Counseling Activities and Pupils’ Discipline

		Peer Counseling	Pupils’ Discipline
Peer Counseling Activities	Pearson Correlation	1	.979**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	172	172
Pupils’ Discipline	Pearson Correlation	.979**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	162	162

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

Table 2 shows that there is a positive correlation between peer counseling activities and pupils’ discipline, $r = 0.979$, $n = 172$, $p = 0.001$.” Since the $p(0.001)$ is less than alpha value (0.05), the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, the test concludes that peer counseling activities positively influence discipline of pupils in public primary schools. This indicates that, in public primary schools where teachers engage in peer counseling activities to a less extent, have pupils manifest cases of indiscipline and thus such schools have many cases of indiscipline in a year. Thus, peer counselors develop friendships through their participation in mentoring programs and usually derive satisfaction from helping a younger pupil, and possibly shaping his or her life in a positive way. This indicates that pupil mentorship is therefore a one good road to decisiveness on career development with pupils.

The researcher also interviewed deputy headteachers who also responded in favor of the view that teachers rarely adopt peer counseling activities to enable pupils in primary schools share their personal experiences as a way of improving their adherence to rules and regulations. On further probing, one deputy headteacher, DHT1, observed,

“Many teachers in my school have not opted for peer counseling among pupils. This is attributed to the fact that most of them lack idea of peer counseling activities and critical activities which need to be undertaken by the learners. This has not really helped in improving pupils’ discipline such as adherence to school rules and regulations”.

These views further indicate that peer counseling has not been fully adopted in public primary schools as a strategy for improving pupils’ discipline in public primary schools. The deputy headteachers further noted,

“Teachers rarely create an opportunity for learners to share their personal experiences as a way of improving their discipline by reducing cases of violence, teenage pregnancies, bullying and fights among themselves”.

This further indicates that peer counseling as an outstanding tool that equips pupil peer counselors with counseling skills and techniques which makes it easier for them to reach their peers but also aid the pupil peer counselors themselves with life skills. Hence, from these mixed findings, school management which engages pupils as peer counselors help their pupils perform better, adopt healthy behavior patterns, understand and accept themselves as well as the meaning of life relating it to their school career interests and satisfaction.

4.0 Implications

The study recommends that teachers should partner with counsellors to train learners as peer counsellors which may enable them acquire basic skills to enable them help their colleagues with challenges of discipline. The Ministry of Education should ensure that every primary school has a trained teacher-counselor who is solely tasked to conduct counseling and modify pupils' behavior patterns. The Ministry of Education should also provide necessary materials and facilities such as counseling units in public primary schools.

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