African Journal of
Education and Practice
(AJEP)

INFLUENCE OF PEER COUNSELLING ON DROPOUT AMONG PUPILS IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MURANGA EAST SUB-COUNTY, MURANGA COUNTY, KENYA

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IPRJB
INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED
JOURNAL AND BOOK PUBLISHING

INFLUENCE OF PEER COUNSELLING ON DROPOUT AMONG PUPILS IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MURANGA EAST SUB-COUNTY, MURANGA COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

Purpose: Primary school dropout in Murang'a East Sub-county is an ongoing phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the influence of counselling on dropout among pupils in public primary schools in Murang'a East Sub-county, Murang'a County, Kenya. The objective of the study was to establish the influence of peer counselling on dropout among pupils in public primary schools.

Methods: The study adopted mixed methodology and thus applied concurrent triangulation research design. Target population comprised of 60 headteachers and 120 teacher-counsellors all totaling to 180 from which a sample of 124 respondents was obtained using Yamane's Formula. Stratified sampling was used to create four different strata based on the number of zones in Murang'a East Sub-county. From each zone, three headteachers and 28 teacher-counsellors were selected using purposive sampling considering schools which have had cases of high dropout rates. This procedure enabled the researcher to sample 12 headteachers and 112 teacher-counsellors. A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from teacher-counsellors whereas an interview guide was used to collect data from headteachers. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically along the objective and presented in narrative forms. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages 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.

Findings: The study established that cases of dropout among pupils are very high in public primary schools. From the study findings, it is also evident that peer counselling is rarely adopted by teachers in public primary schools as a way of reducing cases of dropout among pupils. Thus, the 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 dropout. The Ministry of Education should ensure that every primary school has a trained teacher-counselor and counselling units.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The study recommends that teacher-counselors 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 dropouts.

Key words: *Education, Public Primary School, Dropout, Counselling, Peer Counselling.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Dropout from school is defined as the failure of a pupil to complete his or her studies due to a variety of reasons. In Paris, dropping out most commonly refers to a pupil quitting school before he or she graduates or avoiding entering secondary school or any institution of higher learning (UNESCO, 2015). According to UNESCO (2015), reasons are varied and may include: to avoid bullying, family emergency, poor grades, depression and other mental illnesses, unexpected pregnancy, bad environment, lack of freedom and boredom.

In the same token, in China, Connelly and Zheng (2011) posit that the national school dropout rate is far too high and many pupils are leaving high school without the skills and credentials they need to become successful, productive members of society. Connelly and Zheng (2011) assert that pupils' dropout from school has highly increased due to decline in moral virtues which are attained through teaching of moral character. In other words, pupils' dropout from school is a product of various dynamics found within school and home microsystems. Connelly and Zheng (2011) further note that, while every professional working in a school can work to prevent school dropouts, teacher-counsellors have a unique ability to reach individual learners on a more personal level by adopting strategies such as guidance and counselling. However, the effectiveness of guidance and counselling in reducing cases of pupil dropout is yet to be fully explored. Counselling have been conceived internationally in different ways.

Norwhich (2010) defined counselling as interaction processes co-joining the counselee, who is vulnerable and who needs assistance and the counselor who is trained and educated to give this assistance, the goal of which is to help the counselee learn to deal more effectively with himself or herself and the reality of his or her environment. Eddy (2011) posits that one of the functions of education is to provide opportunities for each learner to reach his or her full potential in the areas of educational, vocational, personal, emotional and moral development.

Teacher-counsellors are the most influential figures, be it positive or negative, to the average child. Without teacher support and involvement, children's moral developmental guidance won't work. To lend credence to these findings, Othman and Baker (2013) assert that, in Malaysia, teacher-counsellors represent the first line of defense in identifying pupils' special needs. They are the key advisors to the children and represent the best hope of personalization of learning. Othman and Bakar (2013) indicate that teamwork between teacher-counsellors and pupils is a necessity for counselling programs to thrive.

In most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa such as Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya, it is a popular view that successful counselling involves, to some reasonable degree, voluntary pupils' participation (Celestine, 2012). For example, in South Africa, Othman and Bakar (2013) have noted that how a pupil perceives counselling might serve as a barrier of the process. In Kenya, scenario is the same with cases of pupils' dropout from school being on the rise in most public primary schools. Gitome, Katola and Nyabwari (2013) report

that a great deal of emphasis in primary schools is placed on helping pupils regulate their behavior in order to succeed in social interactions and thus improve their desire to stay at school. To address the challenge of pupils' dropout from school, provision of counselling services in Kenyan primary schools and secondary schools was formally started in the 1970s (Celestine, 2012). This was as a result of the 1967 and 1968 careers conference reports. This was followed with the establishment of counselling unit in the Ministry of Education in July, 1971.

Despite this assertion, the use of counselling services in Murang'a East Sub-county is still wanting in helping curb dropout from school amongst children in primary schools, which was increasing. Although, the Ministry of Education made a move to curb the increasing cases of school dropout amongst pupils, the dropout rates are still high at 29.7% (Ramani, 2012). To mitigate this, Stoops, Raffer and Johnson (2011) maintain that many learners drop out from school. Problems that occur in primary schools might not exist if counselling services were correctly offered. All these incidents make it necessary to strengthen counselling services in the management of learners' dropout from school. This call can also be realized from the words of Oliva (2012) that, what is lacking is a type of moral issues which empowers an individual primary school child to take responsibility for his or her action in a socially acceptable way.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of peer counselling on dropout among pupils in public primary schools in Murang'a East Sub-county, Murang'a County, Kenya. The objective of this study was therefore to establish the influence of peer counselling on dropout among pupils in public primary schools in Murang'a East Sub-county. The research question was: what is the influence of peer counselling on dropout among pupils in public primary schools in Murang'a East Sub-county?

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study applied both quantitative and qualitative methods. Thus, this study employed concurrent triangulation technique which is a single-phased method in which quantitative and qualitative research designs are used simultaneously in collecting and analyzing information from respondents. Quantitative data were collected and analyzed using ex-post facto design and qualitative data were collected and analyzed using phenomenological design. The two designs are suitable for this study because the variables under study (counseling and pupils' dropout from school) are already manifested in the respondents and therefore, they were studied retrospectively.

The study was carried out in Murang'a East Sub-county in Murang'a County. Murang'a East Sub-county has been selected for this study because dropout from school among pupils in public primary schools is still a problem and is worsening each day. However, few empirical studies have attempted to interrogate the extent to which counselling influences dropout amongst pupils in public primary schools; hence the focus on

Murang'a East Sub-county as the location of study. The study targeted 60 headteachers and 120 teacher-counsellors which totaled 180 respondents.

The researcher used Yamane's Formula for sample size determination to calculate the sample size for this study, thus, desired sample will be 124. Stratified sampling was used to create four different strata based on the number of zones in Murang'a East Sub-county. From each zone, three headteachers and 28 teacher-counsellors were selected using purposive sampling considering schools which have had cases of high dropout rates. This procedure enabled the researcher to realize a sample of 12 headteachers and 112 teacher-counselors

Data were collected using two tools: questionnaire for teacher-counsellors and interview guide for headteachers. The researcher applied a questionnaire with close-ended test items to collect quantitative data from teacher-counsellors. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section consisted of information on respondents' demographic profiles, while the second part contained 5-point Likert Scale type of questions based on the research objective.

A structured interview guide with open-ended items was used to gather qualitative information from headteachers. The information collected was used to corroborate the information collected from teacher-counsellors using questionnaires. Piloting of research instruments was conducted amongst 13 respondents from a sample of public primary schools in Murang'a East Sub-county since according to Kothari (2005), pilot sample should constitute 10% of the study sample (10.0% of 124). The respondents in the piloting were not included during the actual data collection. Validity of research instruments in this study was verified by research experts in counselling psychology including the supervisor to certify the content validity to address the objective in the study.

In order to improve the reliability of the instruments, the researcher, with the help of her supervisor, critically assessed the consistency of the responses on the pilot questionnaires to make a judgment on their reliability. Test re-test technique was used to establish reliability of the items. In this case, the items were administered twice to a group of respondents. Correlation between the two sets of scores were carried out and correlation coefficient obtained using Cronbach Alpha Method. If a reliability coefficient of 0.70 is obtained, then it indicated high internal reliability and the instrument will be used in the study. Data were collected in two concurrent stages.

First, the teacher-counsellors were given the questionnaires to fill with the help of a research assitants who were trained on the content of the questionnaires. At the same time, interviews among headteachers were conducted by the researcher. During the interview, the researcher took short notes. After completion, the researcher collected the duly filled questionnaires and interview notes for analysis.

Data analysis began by identifying common themes. The relevant information was broken into phrases or sentences, which reflected a single, specific thought. The responses to the close-ended items were assigned codes and labels. Frequency counts of

the responses were obtained to generate information about the respondents and to illustrate the general trend of findings on the various variables that are under investigation. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically along the study objective and presented in narrative forms whereas the quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages and inferentially using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Test Analysis with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-Version 23) to explore whether there was relationship between counselling and pupils' dropout from school. The quantitative findings of the study were presented using tables.

3.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Characteristics of the Respondents

This chapter presents the findings of the study. In the first section, however, background information about the respondents is presented, because it might be pertinent in interpreting the data that they provided. The majority (60.0%) of the headteachers were male whereas (40.0%) were female. However, majority (80.5%) of the teacher-counselors were female whereas their male counterparts constituted 19.5%. This information indicates that there was gender parity in the study and that the influence of counselling on dropout among pupils in public primary schools concerns both male and female headteachers and teacher-counselors.

3.1.1 Respondents' Level of Education

The research instruments also elicited information on level of education of the respondents since this variable could influence their ability to provide reliable information about the research questions. The results are shown in Table 5;

Table 1: Levels of Education of Headteachers and Teacher-counselors

Educational Qualifications	Headteachers		Teacher-counselors	
	f	%	f	%
Certificate	0	0.0	65	60.2
Diploma	6	60.0	27	25.0
Bachelors'	3	30.0	10	9.3
Postgraduate	1	10.0	6	5.5
Total	**10**	**100**	**108**	**100.0**

Source: Field Data (2019)

Table 1 shows that majority (60.0%) of the headteachers had Diplomas, 30.0% had Bachelors' Degrees whereas only 10.0% had postgraduate qualifications. However, majority (60.2%) of the teacher-counselors had certificate qualifications, a quarter (25.0%) had Diploma, 9.3% had Bachelors' Degrees whereas a paltry 5.5% had postgraduate qualifications. Hence, this information attest to the fact that level of

education is an important characteristic in making the respondents understand the influence of counselling on dropout among pupils in public primary schools. In the same token, this information indicates that the respondents met the minimum requirements to be headteachers and teacher-counselors and were thus, expected to be competent to respond to the research questions.

3.2 Peer Counselling and Dropout among Pupils in Public Primary Schools

The study sought to establish the extent to which teacher-counselors adopt peer counselling in public primary schools to reduce dropout among pupils. Descriptive data was collected from teacher-counselors and the results are shown in Table 2;

Table 2: Teacher-counselors' Views on the Relationship between Peer Counseling and Dropout among Pupils in Public Primary Schools

Test Items	Ratings				
	SA %	A %	U %	D %	SD %
Teacher-counselors rarely adopt peer counselling to enable pupils in primary schools share their personal experiences as a way of reducing school dropout	75.0	11.5	4.5	7.5	1.5
Peer counselling has not enabled pupils to model each other's behavior as a way of reducing cases of school dropout	88.5	2.5	1.5	4.5	3.0
Teacher-counselors rarely use peer counselling when handling pupils' disciplinary cases as a way of preventing them from leaving school	83.5	5.5	2.5	4.5	4.0

Table 2 reveals that majority (75.0%) of the teacher-counselors strongly agreed with the view that teacher-counselors rarely adopt peer counselling to enable pupils in primary schools share their personal experiences as a way of reducing cases of school dropouts as did 1.5% who agreed. However, only a paltry 4.5% were undecided, 7.5% disagreed whereas 1.5% strongly disagreed. These findings corroborate the findings of a study carried out in Chicago in which Smylie, Conley and Marks (2002) established 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.

According to Smylie et al (2002), 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 indicates that peer counselling has not been fully adopted in public primary schools as a strategy for reducing dropout among pupils in public primary schools. In other words, 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. Thus, peer mentoring and counselling give pupils an opportunity to work on their issues and concerns without fear and intimidation.

Majority (88.5%) of the teacher-counselors strongly agreed with the view that peer counselling has not enabled pupils to model each other's behavior as a way of reducing cases of school dropout. 2.5% of the teacher-counselors agreed. At the same time, 1.5% of the teacher-counselors were undecided, 4.5% of teacher-counselors disagreed whereas 3.0% of the teacher-counselors strongly disagreed. These findings lend credence to the assertions of Bell (2002) who rated peer counselling as an outstanding tool that equips pupil peer counselors with counselling 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. Bell (2002) acknowledges the fact that 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. These findings point to the fact that, through peer counselling, a pupil can define their career interest and make necessary career and other general decisions.

Furthermore, majority (83.5%) of the teacher-counselors strongly agreed with the view that teacher-counselors rarely use peer counselling when handling pupils' disciplinary cases as a way of preventing them from leaving school. A paltry 5.5% of the teacher-counselors agreed. At the same time, 2.5% of the teacher-counselors were undecided, 4.5% disagreed whereas 4.0% of the teacher-counselors strongly disagreed. These findings lend credence to the findings of a study carried out in Mathioya Sub-county in which Kindiki (2009) established 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.

These findings are consistent with the findings of study conducted in Machakos Central Division in which Muli (2011) established that 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.

3.3 Inferential Findings on the Relationship between Peer Counselling and Dropout among Pupils in Public Primary Schools

To verify the possibility of the relationship between peer counselling and dropout among pupils in public primary schools, data was collected on the extent to which teacher-counselors adopt peer counselling activities and the number of pupils who dropout of public primary schools in a year and the results are shown in Table 3:

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice:

Table 3: Results of the Extent of Engagement in Peer Counselling Activities and the Number of Pupils who drop out of Public Primary Schools

Extent of Engagement in Peer Counselling Activities	Number of Pupils who Drop out of Public Primary Schools in a Year
11	17
14	14
29	11
31	7
43	4
49	2

Table 3 indicates that, in public primary schools where teacher-counselors engage in peer counselling activities to a less extent, have many pupils drop out of school in any given year. These findings further corroborate the findings of Kindiki (2009) who established 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 cases of school dropout among pupils. These results were subjected to Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis and results indicated that 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.

3.4 Thematic Analysis: Headteachers' Views on the Influence of Peer Counselling on Dropout among Pupils in Public Primary Schools

The researcher also interviewed headteachers who also responded in favor of the view that teacher-counselors rarely adopt peer counselling 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 headteacher, HT1, observed,

> *"Many teacher-counselors in my school have not opted for peer counselling among pupils. This is attributed to the fact that most of them lack idea of peer counselling and critical activities which need to be undertaken by the learners. This has not really helped in reducing dropout among pupils".*

Just like quantitative findings, these views are in consonance with the viewpoints held by Smylie et al (2002) who 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. These views further indicate that peer counselling has not been fully adopted in public primary schools as a strategy for reducing dropout among pupils in public primary schools. The headteachers further noted,

> *"Teacher-counselors rarely create an opportunity for learners to share their personal experiences as a way of reducing cases of school dropout".*

These views lend credence to the views expressed by Bell (2002) who rated peer counselling as an outstanding tool that equips pupil peer counselors with counselling 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 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Research Findings

This section provides detailed summary of the research findings based on the objective of the study which was influence of peer counselling on dropout among pupils in public primary schools. The study established that peer counselling is rarely adopted by teacher-counselors in public primary schools as a way of reducing cases of dropout among pupils. From the study, many teacher-counselors in public primary schools have not opted for peer counselling among pupils which has not really helped in reducing dropout among pupils. This implies that peer counselling has not been fully adopted in public primary schools as a strategy for reducing dropout among pupils in public primary schools. That is, peer counselling as an outstanding tool that equips pupil peer counselors with counselling skills and techniques which makes it easier for them to reach their peers, but also aid the pupil peer counselors themselves with life skills. Thus, these findings point to the fact that schools which engage pupils as peer counselors help their pupils attend school regularly, adopt healthy behavior patterns, understand and accept themselves as well as the meaning of life relating it to their school career interests and satisfaction.

Conclusions

Drawing from the above findings, it is evident that cases of dropout among pupils are very high in public primary schools. Many pupils in public primary schools manifest increased cases of absenteeism leading to eventual dropout from school. From the study findings, it is also evident that peer counselling is rarely adopted by teacher-counselors in public primary schools as a way of reducing cases of dropout among pupils. Many teacher-counselors in public primary schools have not opted for peer counselling among pupils which has not really helped in reducing dropout among pupils.

Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations:

On peer counseling and dropout among pupils, the study recommends that teacher-counselors 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 dropouts. 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 as a strategy for improved school attendance. The Ministry of Education should also provide necessary materials and facilities such as counselling units in public primary schools.

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