Efficacy of Peer Counselling on Emotional Adjustment among Orphaned Learners in Kenyan Schools

Monica Cheboo Bii[1], Peter J. O. Aloka[2,*], Pamela Raburu[3]

[1]Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, Bondo, Kenya
[2]Psychology and Educational Foundations, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, Bondo, Kenya
[3]School of Education, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, Bondo, Kenya

Abstract   There has been an overwhelming rise in the number of orphans in Kenyan primary schools. The purpose of this study was to establish the efficacy of peer counseling on emotional adjustment among orphaned learners. The study was informed by Carl Rodgers' Self-Centered and Skinners' Behavioral Theories. The study employed sequential triangulation design. Simple random sampling was used to select 30 primary schools and purposive sampling was used to select 60 orphaned pupils, 30 head teachers and 30 teacher counsellors drawn from the selected public schools thus making a total sample of 120 respondents selected from a target population of 404. Structured questionnaires and Interview schedules were used in collecting data. Validity was ensured by expert judgment of lecturers in the Department of Psychology and Technology while reliability was ensured by Cronbach's Alpha and a coefficient of r = 0.717 was reported. Quantitative data was analysed using inferential statistical techniques. Qualitative data collected from interviews was analysed thematically. The study found out that there was a strong positive correlation between peer counselling and emotional adjustment with r=0.730. This study recommended that the Ministry of Education should enact policies regarding the provision of Guidance and Counselling services, care and support of orphaned children in primary schools with the aim of helping them attain appropriate emotional adjustment.

Keywords   Efficacy, Peer counselling, Emotional adjustment, Orphaned learners, Kenyan schools

1. Introduction

There is an overwhelming rate of increase in the orphan population in the world today. The loss of a parent creates a lot of distress to children and adolescents. This is portrayed in form of inappropriate behavioral reactions. More often orphan hood is accompanied with multidimensional problems including prejudice, inadequate school services, inadequate food and sexual abuse among others that can impede children's prospects of completing school (UNESCO, 2007). School going children of ages 5-12 are at increased risk of emotional distress due to unresolved or complicated mourning because of their developmental vulnerability and emotional dependency (Worden, 2012). The most important role of the school is to help the orphaned child adjust appropriately in order to cope with the school work and benefit from it by providing intervention such as guiding and counselling and other form of helping skills.

Formal guidance and counselling can be traced to America in the late 1890s and early 1900s.Frank Parson who has been the father of vocational guidance was among the pioneers of guidance and counselling movement. Through the efforts of Frank Parson guidance and counselling become an organized service and it gained recognition for its important contribution in the society. The global concern related to Guidance and Counselling services in schools has resulted to a number of studies being carried out internationally regarding the benefits of Career Guidance and Counselling Services (CGCS). While Guidance and Counselling services are an easily accessible service in the developed countries, its benefits are not yet adequately in the developing/third world countries (Heibert & Bezanson, 2002). Lapan and Harrington (2009) study in Chicago U.S.A showed correlation evidence of effectiveness of fully implemented school counselling programs on high school learner's academic success. This is also corroborated in a study by Carey, Dimmitt, Hatch, Lapan and Whiston (2008) who found that best forms of counselling from high school counsellors raised college going rates in the USA and also that schools had documented implementation policies and approaches to follow. Forms of counselling are varied as is presented in different literature. For example, Pattison and Harris (2006) classified the approaches as encompassing listening attentively and patiently, perceiving difficulties from the individual's point of view, helping people to see things more clearly, possibly from different perspectives, reducing confusion and facilitating choice and change.

Individual focus is an approach that helps people to explore life and feelings, examine behavior and difficult situations enforce people to initiate change and explore options and advice giving, guiding and providing direction. They viewed this as a Western type of approach.

According to Mapfumo and Nkoma (2013) school counselling encompasses programmes and activities that provide a gate way out of problems arising from the current complex scientific, social, economic and technical world. Guidance Counselling is intended to help the students understand themselves better, their school environment and their world so as to develop adequate capacity to make informed choices and decisions in their life (UNESCO, 2004). Koech Report of 1999 (TIQET) recommended provision of universal and compulsory basic education in which disparities posed by geographical, social and gender factors should be eliminated at all levels in order attain equity in education at all levels. In 2003 free primary School Program was introduced to allow all children of school going age acquire basic education. The introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) saw the rise in enrolment among orphans from 60% to 88% (UNICEF 2006). However, research indicate that the intended objectives may not have achieved as many orphaned students continued to show lack of competencies required to maximize their academic, career and personal potentials.

This study was guided by Person Centered Theory by Rodger and Reinforcement Theory by B.F Skinner (Skinner, 1983). Self-centered theory now frequently referred to as 'person centered' theory focuses on individual's responsibility for his own behaviour (Broadley, 1997). Due to his major contributions in psychotherapy, the approach is referred to as Rogerian Counselling (Rogers, 1957). The theory was relevant to the present study as it provides a 'safe climate' in which orphaned children can explore the full range of their feelings because the therapist deals with them in a caring, understanding and non-judgmental manner (Rogers, 1951). Another theory that informed the present study was Reinforcement Theory by Skinner (1904-1919) (Skinner, 1983). The fundamental assumption of this theory is that a learnt behavior can be un-learnt by implementing strategies in the environment to produce new learning and that a person can learn a new set of behavior (Mutie and Kyungu, 2012). The implication is that an individual's behavior is a function of its consequences and that personality is the sum of the learned responses to the external environment (Skinner, 1983).

Chen, (2009) in a study done in China asserts that, peer support occurs when people provide knowledge, experience, and emotional, social or practical help to each other and is a sure way of helping students in their emotional adjustments. In Nigeria, Ngosi, (2009) revealed that peer group counselling had a significantly positive effect on the self-concept of the adolescent students. Chireshe (2013) revealed that most of the secondary schools in Zimbabwe lacked trained peer counsellors and because of this peer counselling in Zimbabwean secondary schools ineffective.

Sigilai and Bett (2013) found that head teachers and teacher counsellors perceived that peer counselling was ineffective. The reviewed study was carried out in secondary schools whereas the present study was carried out in primary schools. Moreover, some studies were qualitative in nature and lacked quantitative aspects which could have provided and in-depth understanding of the study. The present study filled in gaps by adopting a mixed method approach. Some reviewed studies were done in UK not Kenya where the present study was carried out. Moreover, other reviewed studies were comparative study showing the pupils scores before and after counselling in order to analyse the effectiveness of school counselling. The reviewed study did not identify when and for whom counselling would be most effective while the present study was on a specific group, orphaned pupils that need counselling and find out how school counselling was effective for this group. Other reviewed studies used academic performance to rate the effectiveness of teacher counselling but the present study used emotional adjustment indicators to rate the efficacy of teacher counselling.

There are many orphans in Nandi East Sub –County of school going age. It's expected that orphan learners adjust well emotionally due to the available school counselling services. However, orphaned learners in Nandi East Sub County have emotional adjustment issues because they lack parental attachment and nurturance (USAID, 2015). Most of the researches on orphaned children focused on health issues and only a few mention emotional aspects of these children. For example, in Uganda, Atwine and Bujunirwe (2005) found that there was much level of anxiety, depression and anger among orphans than non-orphans. The current changes in educational demands and socio-economic challenges faced by parents and society add more stress to the traumatized orphans in school which may be expressed through withdrawal, unhappiness, anger, inability to meet goals, anxiety and hyperactivity (Arudo 2008).

2. Methodology

This study employed sequential triangulation research design that involved mixed approaches of data collection analysis and interpretation. A mixed model method of data analysis involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches of data interpretation and analysis at the same time in sequence. Triangulation means merging both qualitative and quantitative data during data interpretation and analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007). The target population for this study was 202 orphaned pupils from standard six and seven, 101 head teachers and 101 teacher counsellors drawn from 101 pubic primary schools. The sample size for this study constituted 30 primary schools, 30 Head Teachers, 30 teacher counsellors and 60 orphaned pupils from class 6 and 7 (one from each class) thus a total of 120 respondents selected from the target population. The researcher used structured questionnaires and interview schedules to collect data. Efficacy of peer counselling was

measured using an eight item questionnaire on a five point Likert Scale. The maximum score that could be obtained was 40 while the least was 8. The emotional adjustment was measured on a 10 item questionnaire on a 5 point Likert Scale. Thereafter a correlation was done between the two variables.To improve on the face validity, a pilot study was conducted after which responses to each item was scrutinized to identify any misunderstandings and ambiguity. Reliability of questionnaire were tested for cronbach's alpha and a reliability co-efficient of 0.717 was obtained.

3. Results & Discussion

The study sought to establish whether there was a significant correlation between peer counselling and emotional adjustment. A Pearson correlation analysis was run between encounter with peer counselling and emotional adjustment. The results are shown in the table 1 below.

Table 1. Correlation between Peer counseling and Emotional Adjustment

		Emotional Adjustment
	Pearson Correlation	.730
Peer Counseling	Sig. (2-tailed)	.022
	N	55

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Source: Researcher's Analysis

The study found a strong positive correlation between peer counselling and emotional adjustment with r = 0.730 which is significant at p<0.05 as it returned a p value = 0.022. This indicates that as encounter with peer counsellor increases, emotional adjustment increases significantly this is because PC was the most effective form of counselling that addresses learner's emotional, social as well as physiological needs. Similarly, Wangu and Mungai, (2007) agree that, peer counselling in the education system has adapted very fast to the changing patterns in the counselling practices and has become effective in developing students intellectual, social, physical and spiritual capacities. Similarly, Tindi and Silsil (2008) observed that PC programmes have addressed the social problems that affect students in schools.

Findings from the interviews showed that majority of the responded were of the opinion that peer counselling was efficient in enhancing emotional adjustment among orphaned pupils. The participants who were in support of this said that peers are free with each other because they interact regularly and at the same level. Secondly they may have had similar experiences and challenges therefore the advice they give could be used to solve their problems, peers offered social support to the orphans, they offered companionship, peers were a standard gauge which they compared themselves with. Orphaned pupils felt secure, worthy, confident and hopeful when with their peers. For example one of the teachers made this statement,

"Peers share feelings, ideas and experiences because they

are at par with each other and through this, they inspire each other." (TC, 12)

Similarly, Santrock (2005) postulated that peers are adolescents who are just about the same age or maturity and tend to be similar in their attitude towards school, school achievement and their education plans. This study recommended that Peer counsellors should be carefully chosen and trained in order to be equipped with knowledge and skills on how to counsel and offer psycho-social support to orphaned learners in their schools. This is corroborated by Sigilai and Bett (2013) study which recommended that the ministry together with other stake holders should provide professional training to teachers and head teachers to make peer counselling more efficient.

The findings from this study also indicated that peers offered a very practical support to the orphaned learners since apart from giving advice, companionship and acceptance, they also mentored them. Mbozi, Debit and Munyati (2006) found out that orphaned learners were socially deprived, tended to encounter high distress and were frustrated compared to non-orphans. Peer counsellors are in a position to offer psychosocial support by virtue of relevant experience, this psychosocial support includes; one, emotional support (esteem, attachment, reassurance) two, instrumental support (material goods and services) and three companionship and information (advice, guidance and feedback (Mark Salzer, 2002). Therefore with support from school, stakeholders and the government peer counselling can be very effective in enhancing emotional adjustment of orphaned learners in primary schools. One head teacher reported that;

"Peer counsellors are persons of the same age and ability therefore their help is more practical because they talk together, compare ideas and do things together   hence learn from each other" (HT, 10).

However, there were a few participants who reported that peer counselling was not effective in enhancing emotional adjustment among orphaned pupils. They cited the following factors to support of their argument; one that peers who have not gone through the same experience may not be able to help. Two, peers who are not mature emotionally may not be able to give professional counselling and thirdly is that to be a peer counsellor one should be a role model therefore this role can turn out to be disastrous if the peer counsellor decide guide others wrongly. For example a teacher counsellor had this to say concerning this arguments;

"some peers do not maintain confidentiality they may end up discussing the information given to them by other pupils, such peers may model be wrong behaviors good example is the recent case where about 500 teenagers were rounded up in Eldoret town and were found taking alcohol engaging in drugs and immoral sexual behaviors. (TC, 9)

This implies that peers have to be carefully chosen and trained so that they can be able to assist fellow students. Influence of peers can be negative or positive. This research recommended that PC programmes should be coordinated

and monitored by the teacher counsellors in the school to ensure that it is yielding good results. PEs provides education which includes decision making skills to help combat the impact of negative peer pressure (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 2008).

Another observation made was that some teacher counsellors felt that peer counselling activities was form of investigation on teachers by the administration because it was coordinated by the head teachers or deputy head teachers and it was elaborate involving report writing consultation. For example one teacher counsellor gave this report, "*Peer counselling does not work well in our school because this can provide an opportunity for the head teacher to investigate about a teacher and victimize him or her*" (TC, 1).

From this observation this study recommends that the school administration should assign roles and give due support to the teacher counsellors to coordinate all the PC programmes in the school. For good results in GC programmes heads of institutions should be ready to accept the need to adjust, correct some of the mistakes, share issues raised by his/her staff strategize means of implementation and assign duties with time scale on when and how to effect change. Some institutions have gone further to involve parents (PTA) and board of governors (BOGs) in identification of issues for peer counselling (Arudo, 2008).

4. Conclusions

Majority of the respondents (orphaned learners) reported that they interacted at the same level with their peers therefore they were free to open up and share their problems. Peers who would have also gone through the same experience were more understanding, willing to help and gave advice based on their own experience. Large portion of the respondents agreed that peers offered practical support to the orphaned learners, they provided attachment that was lacking, mentorship and in some circumstances they provided basic needs. Through social interaction, Orphaned learners got an opportunity to learn and practice appropriate life skills. This research also revealed that peer counselling was useful in schools because peer counsellor complemented the work of teacher counsellors because they were overwhelmed by the large student population and work load in class. The study recommends that Schools should have active policies concerning the provision of guidance and counselling services. Future research could focus on influence of school factors on emotional adjustment of orphaned learners.

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