

Counselling approaches used in solving students' disciplinary problems in secondary schools in Keren sub-zone, Anseba region, Eritrea

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Suggested Citation:

Andegiorgis, G. E. (2020). Counselling approaches used in solving students' disciplinary problems in secondary schools in Keren sub-zone, Anseba region, Eritrea. *Global Journal of Psychology Research: New Trends and Issues*. 10(1), 11-17. DOI: 10.18844/gjpr.v%vi%i.4263

Received October 19, 2019; revised January 15, 2020; accepted March 12, 2020.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Tulay Bozkurt, Istanbul Kultur University, Turkey.

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Abstract

Counselling service is new to the Eritrean education system and its implementation has not been easy. Despite counselling services being part of the educational policy and the curriculum, the use of counselling service is in its initial stages in many schools in Eritrea. This study assessed counselling approaches used in solving students' disciplinary problems in secondary schools in Keren sub-zone, Anseba Region, Eritrea. This study adopted a mixed method research design across a target population that comprised 5 schools, 1,500 students, 100 teachers, 5 teacher counsellors and 5 head teachers. Systematic sampling and simple random and purposive sampling were used to select schools and the participants of the study. Questionnaires and interview guides were used for data collection. Data gathered through questionnaires were processed using descriptive statistical techniques involving frequencies, percentages and means. Data gathered through an interview guide were analysed and presented using quotes, themes and narrative descriptions. The results of this study show that most students (59.8%) and teachers (56.3%) reported that a combination of corporal punishment and counselling was used to handle students' discipline. This study also found out that corporal punishment was more practiced by public schools compared to private schools. This study further found out that approaches such as individual counselling, peer counselling and group counselling were rarely used in managing students' discipline. Moreover, mentoring and student-focused intervention were more used in Keren secondary schools in handling students discipline.

Keywords: Eritrean counselling, counselling approaches, discipline in Eritrea, counsellors, counselling in Keren.

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1. Introduction and background

Teaching students self-discipline is a demanding task. It is a process that requires patience, thoughtful attention, cooperation and a good understanding of the child. Educators and psychologists argue that children can develop skills, knowledge and attitudes through other means other than corporal punishment. Counselling techniques should be emphasised for effective results. Teachers, parents and other caregivers need to be trained to enable them to apply effectively alternative discipline methods (Njogu, 2014).

Yaman and Derya (2017) conducted a study in Turkey with the aim of finding out numerous situations and counselling approaches that school counsellors are likely to encounter during their training and the first 5 years of practice. Fourteen high school counsellors from public and private schools were interviewed with semi-structured questionnaires prepared by researchers in order to obtain data on school counselling cases and approaches. School counsellors have been asked about the cases they see most, the approaches they use with these cases, the support systems they are seeking and the therapy training they are taking after their college graduation. This study used random sampling for schools in various Istanbul districts that have a school counsellor with at least 1 year experience. The researchers found out that counsellors in Turkish schools use approaches like individual counselling, group counselling, peer counselling and student-focused counselling. Their study revealed that students who took part in a school counselling programme had less inappropriate behaviour and positive attitudes towards school than those students who did not take part in the programme.

Bernard (2015), in a study done in Australia, stated that there is no doubt that meaningful counselling of students serves as a preventative, corrective and enriching force in the arena of school life. The study revealed that counsellors applying group methods in schools significantly increase their effectiveness and, therefore, influence students' discipline. As opposed to one-to-one sessions, this is not only true for the most commonly cited criterion of reaching more students through a group. More important issues that suggest their use are often ignored. For example, the group is natural to the setting, there is a decrease in resistance to figures of authority, there is an opportunity to universalise problems and age-appropriate tasks, and individual growth is enhanced by peer cohesion, insight and pressure. The study recommended and encouraged the use of group counselling in schools in order to assist schools in handling students' discipline.

In a study on peer counselling in Zimbabwean secondary schools, Chireshe (2013) sought to establish the peer counselling status perceived by teachers in some Zimbabwean secondary schools. A qualitative design was employed. Twenty-six secondary school teachers who were then enrolled for bachelor's degree completed an open questionnaire. The results revealed that most of the high schools from which the respondents came did not have peer counsellors, and the few who had chose peer counsellors based on their good characters. Peer counsellors have been involved in the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and related issues, such as unwanted pregnancies, sexual abuse, drug abuse, problem-solving and peer pressure overcoming. The teachers wanted peer counsellors to be able to receive training in managing depression study and listening skills, ethical issues and student dispute management.

In a study conducted in the UK by Daniunaite, Cooper and Forster (2015), individual counselling within secondary schools has been shown to bring about significant reductions in psychological distress in the short term and to help young people move towards their personal goals. The study also revealed that there is good evidence that counselling is associated with reductions in psychological difficulties and reduction of students' indiscipline. School staff and children and youth usually positively evaluate school-based counselling, viewing it as an effective way to bring about improvements in mental health and well-being, and helping children and youth to engage in learning and study. Individual counselling is viewed as an accessible service, increasing the range of options available to children and youth who need to discuss issues in their lives with a professional.

However, a study carried out in Kenya by Mwangi and Otanga (2015) found out that students did not consider individual counselling necessary in schools. They overwhelmingly reported a negative attitude towards guidance and counselling programmes. Contrastingly, however, students felt that available counselling resources were inadequate to meet their counselling needs. Negative attitudes towards individual counselling has been explained in the literature as due to the lack of value attached to guidance and counselling from students' own perspective and ability to solve own problems or with peers, and fear of being seen with a counsellor and fear of the lack of confidentiality were also identified as one of the main barriers.

Campell and Brigman (2015) evaluated the impact on academic and social performance of a group counselling intervention. Twenty-five school counsellors were trained to use a structured approach to counselling in small groups with students scoring in math and reading in the mid-to-low range. The focus of the group intervention was on improving student achievement and success skills, including academic, social and self-management skills. Results indicated gains with elementary and middle school students in reading and math achievement scores and teacher-rated behaviour related to student success skills. The study assessed the impact of group counselling on academic and social performance of students. However, it did not address the issue of discipline in schools. Therefore, the current study filled the gap by addressing the issue of student disciplinary issues in high school in Keren sub-zone.

Prout and Prout (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of 17 group counselling school-based studies and found an average effect of 0.97, considered to be a very positive impact. The study also revealed that group counselling with high school students and adolescents was effective and equal to, or better than, individual counselling in handling students discipline cases in schools. Group counselling was found to be favourable to students as the environment was welcoming and encouraging compared to individual counselling which sometimes could be threatening to students.

In Ugunja sub-county, Kenya, Osodo, Joseph and Raburu (2016) conducted a study on the role of peer counsellors in promoting student discipline. The study concluded that the role of peer counselling in helping to promote discipline among students in public secondary schools is substantial. Peer counselling helped improve the behaviours of the students. It concluded that peer counselling helped students and their fellows to understand themselves. In addition, peer counselling helped students improve the behaviour of classroom time management. Furthermore, the study concluded that peer counselling helped to create a secure school environment and also helped students develop a self-image. The study also concluded that peer counselling helps students improve academic achievements, as well as provides knowledge and information on work-related issues.

Chireshe's (2017) study in Zimbabwe found out that school counsellors viewed peer counsellor involvement in attending to withdrawn peers and lessening school counsellors' workload substantially more negatively than students. The negative view could be attributed to the view that culturally young people are viewed as incompetent, lacking skills to help their peers. Adults believe they know it all. It has been noted that school counsellors on their own cannot adequately offer counselling services. They need the assistance of peer counsellors. These programmes aim to provide support, advice and guidance to students, and are preventative in their approach. With the reduction in time allocated to guidance activities in schools, along with teachers undertaking less pastoral care, the teacher counsellor may have a major responsibility for the programmes with little support. The peer counsellors in the international arena were also seen as saving school counsellors' time.

The studies by Chireshe from Zimbabwe and Osodo, Joseph, and Raburu from Kenya showed that peer counselling played a great role in assisting teacher counsellors in handling student issues in schools. The studies also confirmed that students have more confidence in the peer counselling programme because they felt more comfortable to discuss their problems with their peers. Due to lack of information and limited data available in Eritrea, it is difficult to determine whether peer counselling programme plays a role in students' life in secondary school. This being the case, this

study thought to investigate counselling approaches used in solving students' disciplinary problems in secondary schools in Keren sub-zone, Anseba Region, Eritrea.

2. Research methodology

This study used convergent parallel mixed method research design. Questionnaires and interview guide were used to collect the data. Questionnaire was given to teachers and students, whereas an interview guide was administered to the head teachers and teacher counsellors. A sample of 306 students, 20 teachers, 5 head masters, 5 teacher counsellors was used for this study. Systematic sampling, simple random and purposive sampling were used to select schools and the participants. The validity and reliability of the instruments were guaranteed by piloting and Cronbach's Alpha technique. Data gathered through questionnaires were processed using descriptive statistical techniques involving frequencies, percentages and means. The results were then presented using tables, pie charts and bar graphs. Data gathered through interview guides were analysed and presented using quotes, themes and narrative descriptions (Chandler, 2019; Karatas & Saricam, 2016).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Techniques used in dealing with students' discipline in Keren subzone secondary schools

Figure 1 shows the data that were gathered from students and teachers concerning the techniques used by schools to discipline students.

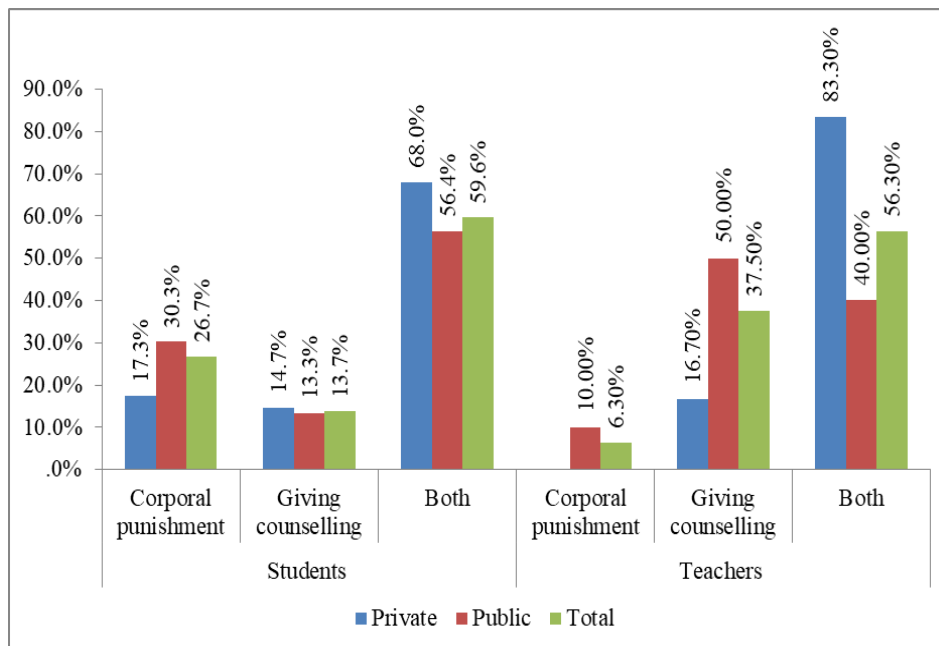


Figure 1. Techniques used in disciplining students; students and teacher's response

According to the students' response (both private and public), a majority (59.8%) stated that their schools used both corporal punishment and counselling. This type of approach was also reported by 56.3% of the teachers. However, the use of corporal punishment to handle students' discipline was higher among public schools at 30.3% compared to 17.3% among private schools. Moreover, 10% of the public schools teachers stated that they used corporal punishment to handle students' discipline. On the other hand, a majority (83.3%) of private school teachers reported that they use both corporal punishment and counselling in order to manage students' discipline. The high percentage use of

corporal punishment among teachers in schools in Keren sub-zone shows that referring students to the counselling office or using counselling is not being practiced in schools.

The results from Figure 1 make it very clear that schools in Keren sub-zone use corporal punishment as a means of disciplining students rather than counselling. These results correspond to the findings of Stefanie (2016) who states that corporal punishment in schools has been formally prohibited since 1997 when the South African Schools Act came into force. However, teachers across South Africa continue to use it as a form of discipline. In a national study that was carried out among 5,939 pupils, 49.8% said that they had been caned or spanked by a teacher or principal as punishment for wrongdoing. Similarly, in a study carried out in Ethiopia, Mulatie (2017) revealed that most students were suffering physical abuse in different ways. About 73.8% of the students admitted to having been caned by a stick by their teachers and 70.7% of students experienced slapping or hitting on their head or face. In addition, a majority (78.5%) of students were victims of pinching. Such results show that corporal punishment is being used as an approach to discipline students in several parts of Africa, and from the results in the current study, Keren sub-zone is no different.

As shown in Figure 1, giving counselling to handle students discipline as indicated by students, the result is almost the same in both private (14.7%) and public (13.3%) schools. The result gives a clear indication that teachers do not pay much attention to counselling in handling students' discipline. Rather, as the result shows, teachers opted to use both counselling and corporal punishment in combination to deal with students' discipline.

3.2. Counselling approaches used in schools to discipline students

Table 1 presents the responses given by students and teachers on what type of counselling approaches were used in their schools.

Table 1 shows that a higher percentage of the students (32.8%) reported that individual counselling was less practiced as an approach to deal with students' discipline. The result indicates that students are not making use of any individual counselling. This finding corresponds to a study carried out in Kenya by Mwangi and Otanga (2015) who found that students did not value individual counselling as a tool to help them improve their behaviour. Negative attitude towards individual counselling was due to fear of being seen with a counsellor and fear of lack of confidentiality. However, majority (37.5%) of the teachers agreed that individual counselling was used as a means to deal with students' discipline. Moreover, Counsellor 4 reiterated the teachers' response by saying, 'I use direct one to one counselling approach, to direct the students by informing, explaining, interpreting and advising them to improve their discipline in school. Even though my school does not have proper office for counselling.'

Table 1. Counselling approaches used in schools; students and teachers' response

Variables	Students' responses					Teachers' responses					
		SA	A	U	D	SD	SA	A	U	D	SD
Individual counselling	f	25	63	12	82	89	5	6	3	1	1
	%	9.2	23.2	4.4	30	32.8	31	37.5	19	6.3	6.3
Peer counselling	f	22	75	29	60	85	0	2	7	3	4
	%	8.1	27.7	11	22	31.4	0	12.5	44	18.8	25
Group counselling	f	37	80	22	55	77	0	4	5	5	2
	%	13.7	29.5	8.1	20	28.4	0	25	31	31.3	13
Mentoring	f	116	75	24	21	35	2	9	2	1	2
	%	42.8	27.7	8.9	8	s	13	56.3	13	6.3	13
Student-focused intervention	f	99	87	18	33	34	1	9	5	1	0
	%	36.5	32.1	6.6	12	12.5	6.3	56.3	31	6.3	0

Note 1: f = frequency; % = percentage; SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = undecided; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree.

Regarding the peer counselling approach in dealing with students' discipline, 31.4% of the students strongly disagreed that peer counselling approach was practiced. A higher proportion of the teacher respondents (44%) were not sure whether peer counselling was used as an approach to handle students' discipline. In terms of group counselling as an approach to deal with students' discipline, 29.5% of the students agreed and 25% of the teachers also agreed that it was used to handle students' discipline. The result revealed that group counselling was used more than peer counselling. A similar result was found by Ngotho (2015) who carried out a study in Kenya. The study found out that 30% of the students agreed that group counselling was one of the most popular counselling approaches their schools used to handle students' discipline.

The student respondents indicated that teachers use more of mentoring (42.8%) and student-focused interventions (36.5%) as approaches to assist in students' discipline. Moreover, a majority (56.3%) of teachers agreed with mentoring and student-focused intervention as means of monitoring students' discipline. Counsellor 5 also stated that, 'I use the traditional way of advising and guiding students in student affairs office, since I was not trained as a counsellor, I just advice students from my life experience and other students experiences. I also mentor students to become what they want to become.' According to the current findings, schools in Keren sub-zone used more of group counselling, mentoring, and student-focused interventions to manage students' discipline.

4. Conclusion

This study investigated the approaches used during counselling in solving students disciplinary problems in secondary schools. The results of this study show that most of the students (59.8%) and teachers (56.3%) reported that a combination of corporal punishment and counselling was used to handle students' discipline. The study also found out that corporal punishment was more practiced by public schools compared to private schools. Only a small percentage of students (13.8%) and teachers (37.5%) reported that counselling was used as an approach to handle students' discipline. The study also found out that approaches such as individual counselling, peer counselling and group counselling were rarely used in managing students' discipline. Moreover, mentoring and student-focused intervention were more used in Keren secondary schools in managing students' discipline. Furthermore, this study revealed that students received more advice concerning educational matters than discipline issues (Mikaeli Manee & Aria, 2018; Shirzad, 2017).

The finding from the qualitative data (head teachers and teacher counsellors) revealed that there was high use of corporal punishment in dealing with students discipline in Keren secondary schools. They reported that schools did not make use of counselling in handling students discipline.

5. Recommendations

The Ministry of Education should revise the curriculum for secondary school education, so as to incorporate a well-functioning counselling service. From the findings of this study, it is clear that counselling services, although present in the national curriculum, is not practiced by majority of the schools and the little that is available is also practiced by unqualified and untrained teachers who head other offices as their prime responsibility. The Ministry of Education should ensure that counselling services are provided by qualified and trained counsellors so that it assists in managing students' discipline.

School head teachers being the highest managers in schools should create a conducive atmosphere for the counselling process to happen, so as to assist students in managing discipline. From the findings of this study it is evident that schools are not using counselling rather schools are using corporal punishment to handle students' discipline. Head teachers should encourage the use of counselling rather than corporal punishment in schools.

Counsellors should motivate students to make use of the available counselling services and they should also introduce individual, peer and group counselling in schools as part of the counselling programme. Students should be encouraged and motivated by their teachers to attend counselling services in order to assist students in managing their discipline in schools.

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