

Influence of Peers on Adjustment of form One Students to Secondary School in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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Abstract School adjustment refers to students' ability to adapt and successfully survive in a new physical and social environment with new people. Peers are groups of people who have common things such *status, abilities or age as the other specified people*. The objective of the study was to establish the influence of peers on adjustment form one students to secondary school. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory was employed by study. This study employed explanatory survey research design. The target population was 207 heads of schools, 207 heads of counseling department, and 14,043 form one students in Uasin Gishu County. Several sampling techniques were used to select study's participants. Sets of the questionnaire and focus group discussion were used in data collection. The study used mixed method hence quantitative and qualitative data. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. The findings after computing the correlation and regression statistic indicated ($r=0.459$, $p<0.05$) and ($\beta = 0.459$, $p < 0.05$) respectively for peer influence on the adjustment to secondary school. Qualitative data was analyzed based on emerging themes. These findings indicate that peers have a significant influence on adjustment of form one students to secondary school. The study concluded that a supportive and warm social environment enhance adjustment and retention of forms students to secondary school.

Keywords: *peers, personal attributes, secondary school adjustment, social environment and supportive social environment*

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1. Introduction

A policy integrating secondary education as part of basic education in Kenya was stated in Sessional Paper No. 1 2005. The secondary education is second of level formal education in the Kenyan education system. This level caters for 14 – 18 year olds within the school system [1]. However, low transition rate from primary to secondary has been identified as one among the many constraints facing secondary education level by the government as a result of high cost of financing secondary education by many parents and guardians. Therefore, MOEST initiated Free Secondary Education (FSE) alongside Free Primary Education (FPE) programme in all public secondary schools which kicked off from January 2008. The former was aimed at achieving raised transition rates of 70% in 2008 and 80% in 2012 from primary to secondary school from the then rates of 50% in 2005. Further, the government aimed to have 90% - 100% completion rates by 2015. The mentioned efforts in providing basic education to all its citizens are because Kenya is a signatory of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1991 as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Therefore, the government has to put in place policy and legislation that

ensures provision of education to all school going age children regardless of their background. For instance, key among these policies is the Children's Act of 2001. This policy states that education is a basic right for all children. In spite of the commendable steps that Kenya has taken towards achieving education for all its citizens, however, adjustment of form one students to secondary school has not been given much consideration yet failure adjust to adaptively may result in school dropout. School dropout risks involve: child labour including domestic workers, commercial sexual exploitations, mining, fishing, and quarrying just to mention a few [2].

2. Statement of the Study

School transition from primary to secondary implies academic and social and environment change [3] hence the need for adjustment. Adjustment or adaptation is important for students to survive and fit in well in the social environment [4]. Positive school adjustment may lead to school retention, academic success as well as general well-being of the form one students [5]. On the contrary, failure to adjust may lead to a decline in students' motivation, absenteeism, a decline in academic achievement, drug abuse and eventually school dropout [5]. Poor or negative school adjustment leading to school

dropout poses a serious problem since early school dropout jeopardizes future career, employment opportunities and life chances for such students [6,7]. This implies that, such students will find themselves in low paying jobs if any, or even be unemployed after all, hence contributing negatively to the economic development of themselves as well as the entire nation. Ultimately, a poor nation made up of illiterate members.

The Kenyan government has ensured increased primary to secondary school transition through its initiation of Free Secondary Education (FSE) funding policy [8]. However, not much has been done to address form one student adjustment to secondary school which may influence their retention in school or drop out of school as well. Previous Kenyan studies have only focused on factors hindering transition from primary to secondary school, relationship among school Adjustment, Gender and Academic Achievement amongst Secondary School Students and Influence of Parent-Adolescent Communication on Psychological Adjustment of Secondary School Students [9,10,11] respectively. However, none of them has not directly addressed influence of peers on adjustment of form one students to secondary school. This study therefore, sought to fill this knowledge gap by establishing the influence of peers on adjustment of form one students to secondary school.

3. Purpose and Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of peers on the adjustment of form one students to secondary school in Uasin Gishu County using explanatory research design. The social environment was indexed by peers or friends. The objective was to determine the influence of peers on adjustment of form one students to secondary school in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya.

4. Literature Review

Secondary school students' adjustment is a phenomenon that is of great concern to educationists. Educationists need to know what they can do to help their form one students adjust positively and attain good grades from school [4]. School adjustment is a wide construct that include many different aspects such as school adaptation, satisfaction, engagement, academic achievement, and pro-social behavior. Students who are well-adjusted usually enjoy most of the school activities and value what they learn. As a result, they are positively involved in classroom activities hence receive academic high grades [12]. Poor school adjusted students on the other hand, register low academic grades, portray behavioral problems, exhibit discordant educational aspirations and may even opt for school dropout altogether [13]. Adjustment to secondary school occur when one is between 14-19 years is of age which is group is described as the youth stage in the Kenyan set up.

[14] assert that principal concerns on adjustment to secondary school for some students include: difficulty in making friends, keeping up academically, fitting in to the group, and being bullying. It is worth noting that peer

harassment or bullying, in particular, would place students at risk for lower academic grades and other school problems. Peer victimization may directly affect school outcomes resulting to low grades attainment as well as irregular school attendance. These may eventually translate to social and psychological unsettledness on form one student. In fact, negative consequences of peers including drugs and alcohol abuse, absenteeism and worse of them all are school dropout [15]. These are the unfortunate strategies that students may apply or use to avoid harm at school.

Peer relations which translates to social environment of the school is tremendously influential as both a context for and as direct influence on adolescent development. As such, warmth may be perceived as a key aspect of high-quality peer relationships as well as highly functional school and classroom climates. Experiencing warm interactions with classroom peers create a climate of comfort and help meet students' need for relatedness [16,17]. This is not a surprising requirement because adolescents whom form one students are inclusive, spend more of their time in school than in any other place outside their homes. Because of the great amount of time that adolescents spend in school, schools need to provide the context or environment in which adolescents enjoy hence develop [5]. According to [18] students in Kenya's secondary schools take four years to complete the course. Therefore, the development can either take a positive or negative dimension depending on the perceived and real social environment provision in the secondary school.

5. Methodology

This study employed Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory. The reasons for the proposed ecological theory include its ability to assist in conceptualizing the construct of development as a joint function of the personal attributes and environmental characteristics. The means that the individual attributes and environmental forces interplay to influence development. Bronfenbrenner's theory uses the multi-system layers of the environment that influence child's development. The ecological theory consists of five environmental systems that range from close interpersonal interactions to broad-based influences of culture. The five systems are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem [19]. This theory assisted the study in identifying potential contributors among them peers or inhibitors to academic achievement and success in the school. This refers to the acknowledgement of the shared responsibility of all the key players' peers inclusive on adjustment of form one students to secondary school. The target population was 207 heads of schools, 207 heads of counseling department, and 14,043 form one students in Uasin Gishu County. Stratified, purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select the schools, head teachers, counselors and student's respectively. The sample size was 100 head teachers, 100 heads of counseling department and 389 form one students. Self administered sets of questionnaire and focus group discussion were used in data collection. The study used mixed research method. For quantitative data, questionnaire data was coded and entered into the computer using SPSS. Both

descriptive such as frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation as well as inferential statistics that included specifically Pearson Correlation were performed. Qualitative data was analyzed based on emerging themes.

6. Data Analysis, Presentation, and Interpretations

The objective of this study was to determine the influence of peers on adjustment of Form One student to secondary school. The research was: What influence do peers have on adjustment of form ones to secondary school? The study sought from students the influence of peers on adjustment of Form One student to secondary school. The questionnaire (Appendix II, Part B), give students' information concerning peers or friends on adjustment of form one students to secondary. This data has been presented on Table 1. The findings indicate that form one students agreed that they had friends or peers who were cared about and supported them. Further, they did not face any form of harassment or bullying on entry

to secondary school hence the means (M = 4.21, 4.32) respectively. However, it should be noted that form one students did not find it easy to make friends on arrival to secondary school. The results also indicate that the form ones did not have older siblings and or relatives in senior classes who informed me about the secondary school in advance (M=3.35, 2.50) respectively. Therefore, they had to navigate the new environment with the help of new found friends. These friends also helped them not to feeling worried in the new school but in turn feel at home (M= 4.00). These can be concluded to mean that the presence of friends who cared, were supportive and absence of harassment may have led to smooth adjustment of form one students to secondary school. On the contrary, the failure by form one students to make friends easily on arrival to secondary school may have been due to lack of social skills on their part. The fact that they had no older siblings to inform them in advance about the secondary school they were to join, made formation of new friends on arrival to school of great importance for adjustment to secondary school to be achieved.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics concerning influence of peers on adjustment

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I made friends easily and I have maintained them since arrival to school.	290	1	5	3.35	1.525
I have friends who care about me	290	1	5	4.06	1.260
my friends are very supportive in class work	290	1	5	4.21	1.109
I feel at home and not worried in my new school because friends are always there for me	290	1	5	3.59	1.463
I did not get harassed or bullied on arrival to this school	290	1	5	4.32	1.314
I found/ have old students from my former primary school in this school. they helped me settle easily	290	1	11	3.14	1.952
I have older siblings and or relatives in senior classes who informed me about this school	290	1	5	2.50	1.800
senior students treat me as their equal or well	290	1	5	3.51	1.528
other students in this school care about me	290	1	5	3.69	1.349
I feel connected to this school because of my friends (I feel at home here)	290	1	5	3.78	1.505
Valid N (list wise)	290				

Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient was tested in order to check the actual strength of the relationship between peers and adjustment of form one

students to secondary variables of the study. The findings are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Influences of Peers on Adjustment of Form One Student to Secondary School

	PEER INFLUENCE	ADJUSTMENT TO SECONDARY SCHOOL
PEER INFLUENCE	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
ADJUSTMENT TO SECONDARY SCHOOL	Pearson Correlation	.459**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	290

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Correlation results presented in Table 2 indicate that peer influence has a substantive and significant relationship on adjustment to secondary school. Adjustment to secondary school exhibited a significantly positive relationship with peer influence (r=0.459, p<0.05).

Therefore, from these results it can be concluded that the type of friends or peers a form one make on entry to secondary school plays a significant role in his or her adjustment in secondary school.

Table 3. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
	.459 ^a	.211	.208	.46766	1.632

a. Predictors: (Constant), PEER INFLUENCE

b. Dependent Variable: ADJUSTMENT TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

The model summary [Table 3](#) (see appendices) has an explanatory power (R^2) of 21.1 percent at a significant confidence level (p -value < 0.05). The peers have a significant positive effect on adjustment of form one students to secondary school at 95 percent confidence level ($p < 0.005$). The issue of serial correlation was also

controlled by checking the Durbin-Watson value for all of the models which is another test used to detect auto-correlation (Durbin & Watson, 1951). The Durbin-Watson value was close to 2 that is 1.632 which was considered acceptable (Gandia & Archidona, 2008). This means that there was no severe serial correlation in the models.

Table 4. ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	16.837	1	16.837	76.984	.000
Residual	62.987	288	.219		
Total	79.824	289			

Dependent Variable: Adjustment To Secondary School

b. Predictors: (Constant), Peer Influence

The ANOVA [Table 4](#) (see appendices) reports a significant F statistic of $F(16.837) = 76.984$, $p < 0.05$. This reveals that the independent variable peers had a

significant effect on the dependent variable adjustment of form one students to secondary school.

Table 5. Coefficient of Regression Model between Peers and Adjustment

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.376	.132		18.060	.000
Peer Influence	.312	.036	.459	8.774	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Adjustment to Secondary School.

The regression results on [Table 5](#) ($\beta = 0.459$, $p < 0.05$) observed a positive and significant effect on the relationship between peer influence and adjustment to secondary as shown in [Table 5](#) above. The results signified that a unit change in peer influence leads to 0.459 unit change in adjustment to secondary school thus supporting the idea that peer influence leads to easy adjustment to secondary. The conclusion drawn was that the relationships form one students developed with peers determined their adjustment to secondary school. Those who happened to interact with warm, caring and supportive peers helped them develop a sense of belonging in their new secondary school environment.

7. Discussion

The study findings after computing the correlation statistic between peers and adjustment of form one students to secondary school was ($r=0.459$, $p < 0.05$) and regression analysis ($\beta = 0.459$, $p < 0.05$) respectively indicate a significant influence of peer on adjustment. These findings indicate that peer influence had a significantly positive relationship with adjustment of form one students to secondary school. Further, it implies that the interaction with peers through friendship leads to support and care hence positive adjustment of form one student to secondary school. Therefore, it can be concluded that the type of friends or peers form one students make on entry to secondary school plays a significant role in his or her adjustment to secondary school. This study's finding was in agreement with [\[20\]](#) observation that friendship during the challenging period of adjustment to secondary schools plays an important role. More importantly, a high sense of belonging, the feeling of social connection and being socially connected may lead to higher motivation to remain in school and high academic grades. On the contrary, the effect of a low sense of belonging may lead students to feel alienated at

school, which in turn may cause poor academic achievement and even worse still they drop out of school [\[21\]](#). Peers support is particularly needed because of increased assignments and homework as reported by form one student (P4) during the focus group interview that:

P4: The high school assignments and class work is just so much. I find myself most of the time unable to meet the given dead line this happens to most of us. In fact, work in groups to meet homework deadlines.

One other most important contribution of peer support and care is the general well being of form one student hence psychological adjustment. [\[22\]](#) confirm that when students feel supported by significant figures like peers in the school environment, they become motivated and enjoy learning hence get focused to school work. This implies that they experience positive social and emotional wellbeing which in turn contribute school adaption and retention.

Peers or friends play an important role in the adjustment of form one students to the new secondary school environment. Interactions with peers who were supportive and caring lead to positive school adjustment through feeling of belonging and feeling of social connection. These feelings increase students' motivation to remain in school for those with such feelings than those who have none. Further, a supportive and warm social environment make form one students to become motivated to remain in school, be focused to school work, enjoy teaching and learning activities hence completion and graduation from high school, and entry into college. Problematic behaviours like absenteeism, faked illness, disinterest on school activities, joining of negative peers and even opting for early school dropout are less prevalent in a supportive and warm social environment. Therefore, students those about to join form one need to be taught social skills like those of making friends for use during secondary school adjustment and later on in life. This is because ability to develop positive friendship or peer-relations may enhance development of solid and stable

friendships during schooling and later in their lives. Further, there is need for creation of or cultivation a warm social environment. This means that the significant others in the school environment need to be available and approachable. With such stable friendship, the environment may meet students' social and academic needs hence higher academic achievement and better socio-emotional health. This study therefore, recommend a future research is to investigate whether the need for peer support are equivalent for girls and boys.

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