

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

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### ABSTRACT

Counseling service is new to Eritrean education system and its implementation has not been easy. Despite counseling services being part of education policy and the curriculum, the use of counseling service is in its initial stages in many schools in Eritrea. This study assessed counseling approaches used in solving students' disciplinary problems in secondary schools Keren Sub-Zone, Anseba Region, Eritrea. The study adopted a mixed method research design across a target population that comprised of 5 schools, 1500 students, 100 teachers, 5 teacher counselors, and 5 head teachers. Systematic sampling, 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 was processed using descriptive statistical techniques involving frequencies, percentages and means. Data gathered through interview guide was analyzed and presented using quotes, themes and narrative descriptions. The results of the current study showed that most students 59.8% and teachers 56.3% reported that combination of corporal punishment and counseling was used to handle students' discipline. The study also found out that corporal punishment was more practiced by public schools compared to private schools. The study further found out that approaches such as individual counseling, peer counseling and group counseling 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 counseling, counseling approaches, discipline in Eritrea, counsellors, Counseling in Keren.*

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. Counseling techniques should be emphasized for effective results. Teachers, parents and other care givers need to be trained to enable them apply effectively the alternative discipline methods (Njogu, 2014).

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## **Counseling Approaches Used in Solving Students Disciplinary Problems in Secondary Schools in Keren Sub-Zone, Anseba Region, Eritrea**

Bernard (2015) in a study done in Australia stated that there is no doubt that meaningful counseling of students serves as a preventative, corrective, and enriching force in the arena of school life. The study revealed that counselors 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 universalize 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 counseling in schools in order to assist schools in handling students' discipline.

In a study done in the UK by Daniunaite, Cooper, and Forster (2015) individual counseling 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 counseling is associated with reductions in psychological difficulties and reduction of students' indiscipline. School staff and children and youth usually positively evaluate school-based counseling, 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 counseling 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.

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

Not many studies here focused on investigating counseling approaches used in solving students' disciplinary problems in Eritrea. Since there was scarcity of information and limited data available locally in Eritrea, this study thought to investigate counseling approaches used in solving students disciplinary problems in secondary schools in Keren Sub-Zone, Anseba Region, Eritrea.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The 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 interview guide was administered to head teachers and teacher counsellors.

A sample of 306 students, 20 teachers, 5 head masters, 5 teacher counsellors were 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 was guaranteed by piloting and Cronbach Alpha technique. Data gathered through questionnaires were

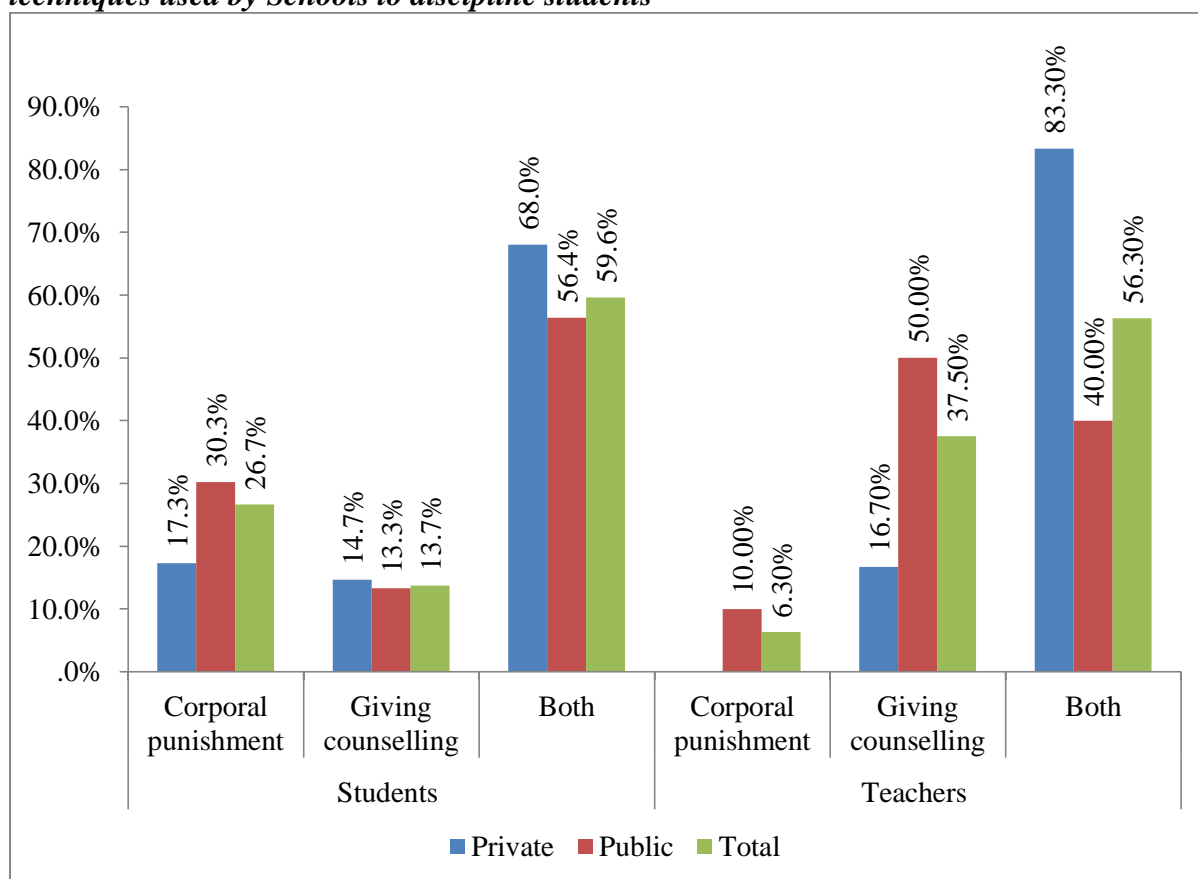
**Counseling Approaches Used in Solving Students Disciplinary Problems in Secondary Schools in Keren Sub-Zone, Anseba Region, Eritrea**

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 analyzed and presented using quotes, themes and narrative descriptions.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

*Techniques Used in Dealing with Students' Discipline in Keren Subzone Secondary Schools.*

*Figure 1 presents data that was gathered from students and teachers concerning the techniques used by Schools to discipline students*



**Figure1. Techniques used in disciplining students, students and teachers response**

According to the students' response (both private and public), majority, (59.8%), stated that their schools used both corporal punishment and giving counseling. 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, majority, 83.3%, private school teachers reported that they use both corporal punishment and counseling in order to manage students' discipline. The high percentage use of corporal punishment among teachers in schools in Keren subzone shows that referring students to counseling office or using counseling is not being practiced in schools.

**Counseling Approaches Used in Solving Students Disciplinary Problems in Secondary Schools in Keren Sub-Zone, Anseba Region, Eritrea**

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 counseling. This results correspond to the findings of Stefanie (2016) that states 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. A national study that was carried among 5,939 pupils surveyed, 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 by Mulatie (2017) revealed that most students were suffering physical abuse in different ways. 73.8 % of the students admitted to have been caned by stick by their teachers. And 70.7% of students experienced slapping or hitting on their head or face. In addition, the majority 78.5% of the students were victim of pinching. Such result show that corporal punishment is being used as an approach to discipline students in several parts of Africa and as the result in the current study shows Keren sub zone is no different.

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

***Counseling Approaches Used in Schools to discipline students***

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

***Table 1 Counseling Approaches Used in Schools; Students and Teachers' Response***

| Variables                    |   | Students responses |      |     |    |      | Teachers responses |      |    |      |     |
|------------------------------|---|--------------------|------|-----|----|------|--------------------|------|----|------|-----|
|                              |   | SA                 | A    | U   | D  | SD   | SA                 | A    | U  | D    | SD  |
| Individual counseling        | 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 counseling              | 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 counseling             | 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  | 12.9 | 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*

Table 1, shows that a higher percentage of the students (32.8%) reported that individual counseling was less practiced as an approach to deal with students' discipline. The result indicates that students are not making use of any individual counseling. This finding corresponds to a study carried out in Kenya by Mwangi and Otanga (2016) that found out students did not value individual counseling as a tool to help them improve their behaviour. Negative attitude towards individual counseling was due to fear of being seen with a counsellor and fear of lack of confidentiality. However a higher proportion, (37.5%) of the teacher agreed that individuals counseling 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 counseling approach, to direct the students by informing, explaining, interpreting

## Counseling Approaches Used in Solving Students Disciplinary Problems in Secondary Schools in Keren Sub-Zone, Anseba Region, Eritrea

*and advising them to improve their discipline in school. Even though my school does not have proper office for counseling.”*

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

The student respondents indicated that teachers use more of mentoring at 42.8% and students focused interventions at 36.5% as approaches to assist in students' discipline. Moreover, majority, (56.3%), of the teachers agreed 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 group counseling, mentoring and student focused intervention to manage students discipline.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study investigated the approaches used during counseling in solving students disciplinary problems in secondary schools. The results of the current study showed that most students 59.8% and teachers 56.3% reported that combination of corporal punishment and counseling 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 small percentage of students 13.8% and teachers 37.5% reported counseling was used as an approach to handle students' discipline. The study also found out that approaches such as individual counseling, peer counseling and group counseling 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 the study revealed that students received more advice concerning educational matters than discipline issues.

The finding from the qualitative data (head teachers and teacher counselors) 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.

### **Recommendations**

The ministry of education should revise the curriculum for secondary school education so that to incorporate a well-functioning counselling service. From the findings of the current study, it came out clearly that counselling services though present in the national curriculum it 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 counselors so that it assists in managing students' discipline.

## **Counseling Approaches Used in Solving Students Disciplinary Problems in Secondary Schools in Keren Sub-Zone, Anseba Region, Eritrea**

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

Counselors should motivate students to make use of the available counseling services and they should also introduce individual, peer and group counseling in schools as part of counseling program.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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