

Chapter 19

Peer Support and Adjustment Among First-Year Students at University

Kennedy Otieno

St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Tanzania

ABSTRACT

Peer support and adjustment among first-year students at university will help them overcome difficulties they face in their academic journey. The challenges facing first-year students at the university include home sickness, freedom of transition to university life, time management, budgeting, partying, and the cost of education. The current study adopted literature review as the methodology in order to analyze secondary data. The researcher sought to objectively and rationally review empirical studies from reputable education sites such as Google Scholar, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), and JSTOR. The data were analyzed qualitatively by using content analysis where only the main ideas of the key findings were considered. The study established that parental and peer support received among first-year students have contributed towards their adjustment at universities.

INTRODUCTION

Peer support is a concept that varies in definition among scholars. One of the most prevalent definitions of peer support in literature includes the process of giving and receiving encouragement and assistance to achieve long-term recovery (Wilson, 2019). Peer support occurs when people provide knowledge, experience, emotional, social or practical help to each other. Additionally, research postulates that peer supporters offer emotional support, share knowledge, teach skills, provide practical assistance and connect people with resources and opportunities (Solomon, 2014). Adjustment is related to an individual's ability to establish healthy relationships with the surrounding and maintain these relationships (Claudius, 2016). In the early days of the university period when students leave their homes and lives which they have been leading and start a different life, students undergo a process that we call adjustment. During this process, in order to help them, it is important and necessary to provide them with habituation and

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orientation (adjustment training) services that include among others the psychological and guidance services. Adjustment training services will enable newly admitted students in the universities to adjust to this new environment and conditions in their lives, and to overcome difficulties which they might face.

Peer support and adjustment is an emotional support, which is described as an indication by one person to another that he or she loves, values, and cares for the other (Singleton, 2020). Emotional social support also includes verbal communication known as disclosure and the sharing of intimate details with others. In other studies, peer support involves several other conceptual indicators such as intimacy, comfort, and tangible support (Hale, et al., 2005). Tangible support actions, such as lending a friend twenty dollars or giving your child a ride, serve as non-emotional indicators of support (Hale et al., 2005). These various components of peer support are present in relationships with friends, family, romantic partners, and co-workers: relationships that form multifaceted resources for companionship and belonging (Eshbaugh, 2008). Despite the many definitions of peer support found in literature, feelings of belonging appear to be a common theme. For example, one study found that membership in a group of students who share experiences, such as being involved in sport activities or clubs, improves adjustment and sense of belonging within college groups (Garcia, 2005).

Mapolisa and Mafa (2012) stated that in the world over, universities are recognized as places where knowledge generation, research and innovation are advanced. University students take various courses in different programmes but generally the education system in different counties requires those admitted to such programmes to have completed secondary education or a diploma (Botha & Simelane, 2007). The requirements for admission into university programmes vary from institution to institution or from one jurisdiction to another. Universities are recognized as places where knowledge generation, scholarship and innovation are advanced (Kearney, 2018). The main functions which universities are supposed to carry out have been listed as follows: instruction, research, publication and public service (HEC, 2006). It is on this basis that the first year students are carefully and meritoriously selected for admission at the university. First year students at university are considered beginners and potential conduits through which universities develop inquiry capacity and also generate high skills needed for a functional economy in its effort to address complex issues such as discovery of vaccines, medicine, offering solution to global financial recessions, climate change and poverty alleviation.

As pointed out by Wilson (2019), participation in sports may also provide students with unique development opportunities that positively impact in the student's social self-concept. A student's identification and involvement in sports creates a social network. Children who participate in sports have been shown to have better social skills and to be more socially mature than children who do not participate in sports (Fletcher et. al., 2015). The study concluded that effects of games and sports on students' peer support and adjustment vary from one area to another and between types of games/sports. In the views of Singleton (2020), although games and sports have been included in Tanzania education curriculum for university education, its implementation is still poor. In the perception of some parents, students' participation in games and sports are still considered unfavorable to their educational achievements. Daniel and Emmanuel (2015) observed that facilities for games and sports are lacking in most institutions. The lacking facilities include playing grounds, balls, sports gears or kits and lack of competent sports trainers or teachers that negatively affect peer support and adjustment among first year students.

According to Claudius (2016) peer support and adjustment among first year students at university will enable them overcome difficulties they face in their academic journey. It is not possible to identify every first year university students who encounter many different challenges such as the problem of adjustment to environment, depression, bilateral relations, problems related to nutrition and education.

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