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PEER-COUNSELLING MODELS IN BOARDING SECONDARY SCHOOLS: IMPLEMENTATION ACROSS SCHOOL TYPES AND CATEGORIES IN BUNGOMA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Boarding secondary schools remove adolescents from family support structures for extended periods, and peer counselling is widely expected to substitute for that loss. Yet in Kenya the models through which peer counselling is delivered have never been mapped empirically and schools continue to sustain programmes whose comparative structure and adequacy are unknown. This study examined the peer-counselling models implemented across school types and categories in boarding secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya. Anchored on Social Support Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and adopting a pragmatic paradigm, the study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design within a descriptive survey framework. Two-stage stratified sampling drew 15 schools from a population of 60; cluster and simple random sampling yielded 300 learners in Grade 10, Form Three and Form Four; and purposive sampling secured interviews with ten deputy principals. Data were generated through a 47-item learner questionnaire, a semi-structured interview schedule, a document analysis checklist and an observation checklist, and were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation and dummy-variable regression in IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26), together with thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). All four models were implemented at high to very high levels, with the Peer Support Group Model highest ($M = 4.357$, $SD = .682$) and significantly more extensive than the Helper/Peer Mentor ($M = 4.070$), Peer Leadership ($M = 4.063$) and Peer Education ($M = 4.038$) models, all $p < .001$. Only two models, however, predominated in practice: dyadic mentoring for 59.0% of learners and group support for 40.0%. Implementation differed significantly by school type, which accounted for 23.0% to 41.6% of the variance (all $p < .001$), but not by school category ($R^2 < .02$, all $p > .05$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected for school type and retained for school category. No deputy principal described a formally named model, and three uncoordinated selection logics operated across schools. Peer counselling in the county is thus extensive in reach but unstandardised in design, shaped by gender composition and administrative convenience rather than by learner need. The study recommends a county-wide model framework, competency-based selection, supervised training and a formal referral pathway.

KEYWORDS: peer counselling; peer-counselling models; socio-emotional well-being; learner discipline; boarding secondary schools; Social Support Theory; Bungoma County, Kenya

1. INTRODUCTION

Schools are no longer defensibly understood as sites of academic instruction alone. They are among the most consequential environments for adolescent psychosocial development, and the structured counselling interventions they house shape academic achievement, career readiness, social competence and emotional regulation (ASCA, 2019; Carey & Dimmitt, 2012). Durlak et al. (2021) establish that school psychosocial support systems strengthen learner resilience and reduce behavioural difficulty, and comparative international evidence shows that adolescents in boarding institutions present psychological well-being needs materially distinct from those of day scholars, owing to prolonged separation from family, regimented routine and intensified peer contact, with direct implications for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Muslikah, Kholiq, Baroroh & Dewi, 2026). Cross-national analysis demonstrates that school bullying and the wider societal well-being climate significantly shape adolescent life satisfaction across OECD countries (Kim, 2026), while an umbrella review of global evidence identifies school-based emotional distress, peer victimisation and weak social support as consistent correlates of non-suicidal self-injury among children and adolescents (Zhong et al., 2026). The cumulative implication is unambiguous: unaddressed socio-emotional need inside school settings carries severe developmental and behavioural consequence, and structured learner support is an educational imperative rather than an optional service.

The international literature is equally clear that the benefit of school-based support is contingent on how the support is structured, supervised and integrated into institutional leadership. Setiawan, Aslamiah, Noorhapizah and Novitawati (2026) argue from cross-continental evidence that counselling attains its intended outcomes only where school leadership deliberately builds synergy between administrative structures and guidance services. Systematic review and meta-analytic comparison of school-based interventions across the United States and East Asia demonstrates that outcomes vary appreciably with cultural context, delivery model and implementation fidelity, cautioning against the uncritical transfer of counselling models between settings (Park et al., 2026; Anfone & Galigao, 2024; Jackson & Takahashi, 2026). Within self-determination theory, perceived student cohesiveness, equity, teacher support and autonomy support significantly predict learner engagement (Bizimana, 2026), while Beaumont and Schalkwyk (2026) contend that adolescent well-being improves markedly only where emotional competence is deliberately embedded in mainstream curriculum content and teaching strategy. Studies of peer support among refugee and internationally mobile learners confirm that peer relationships enhance motivation, self-efficacy and psychological adjustment during transition and dislocation (Zimmerman, 2026; Charania, 2025; Koirala et al., 2026; Soetan, Umukoro & Odeh, 2026), with person-centred evidence indicating that such motivational and adjustment profiles differ meaningfully by gender (Li, King & Wang, 2026).

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, attention to adolescent mental health, psychosocial support and behavioural adjustment in school environments has grown considerably (Mutiso et al., 2018). Regional studies report rising emotional distress, peer pressure, behavioural difficulty and social adjustment challenge among secondary school learners, positioning schools as decisive developmental environments. Peer counselling, understood as a programme in which peers assist peers to identify and resolve their own difficulties, has emerged as a culturally adaptable and low-cost response. In Nigeria, Adewumi and Adeniran (2019) established that structured peer counselling significantly improves adolescents' behavioural adjustment, self-concept and emotional stability, and broader African school-based peer support initiatives have been associated with reduced indiscipline, improved peer relationships and strengthened emotional resilience. Consistent with this, Reupert, Foster, Chen and Maybery (2026) show that learners carrying additional emotional and caregiving burdens remain inadequately served by existing school structures, reinforcing the case for accessible, peer-mediated support within secondary education systems.

In Kenya, the Ministry of Education (2018) recognises guidance and counselling as a central component of the learner support framework, and empirical work confirms that effective counselling services strengthen learner discipline and academic performance (Kilonzo, 2019; Ndegwa, 2020). Peer counselling has been commended as a strategy for curbing indiscipline (Baliach et al., 2022), with evidence that it influences discipline and mitigates truancy and substance use (Ngumi & Kariuki, 2018) and contributes to self-efficacy, emotional adjustment and interpersonal relationships (Wango, 2019). In Kiambu County, peer-counselling interventions reduced bullying, fights and strikes (Kariithi et al., 2022); in Meru South, by contrast, programmes were constrained by uncoordinated selection criteria, inadequate training and the absence of programme evaluation (Kamore & Tiego, 2015). The Kenyan evidence base thus establishes that peer counselling can work, and simultaneously that it frequently does not, for reasons of design rather than of principle.

Bungoma County brings this tension into sharp relief. Its boarding secondary schools are strongly performance-oriented, and county education priorities emphasise examination results and school ranking as the principal indicators of institutional success (Bungoma County Government, 2018), an emphasis that may unintentionally displace structured psychosocial support. Related work on peer mentoring in the county reports improved learner adjustment, smoother transition into boarding life and reduced disciplinary cases (Makokha & Sang, 2020). Yet between 2020 and 2026 the county recorded repeated and destructive incidents of learner unrest and dormitory fire across multiple boarding institutions, among them Chesamisi High, Kimilili Boys, Ndivisi Boys, Khasoko Boys, Bukembe Boys and Mbakalo Boys. Peer-counselling programmes were formally in place in schools of exactly this kind. That they coexisted with unrest of this severity is the empirical puzzle this study addresses.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Boarding secondary schools should operate structured and professionally supervised peer-counselling models in which trained learner-counsellors work in deliberate synergy with school leadership,

guidance departments and classroom teachers to safeguard learners' socio-emotional well-being and promote self-regulated discipline (Setiawan et al., 2026). Because boarding learners are separated from their families for extended periods, such models are expected to substitute for the lost family support system by supplying accessible emotional support, positive peer cohesiveness and autonomy-supportive relationships that strengthen belonging, engagement and adaptive coping (Muslikah et al., 2026; Bizimana, 2026; Zimmerman, 2026). Where emotional competence is intentionally embedded in school routine, curriculum content and teaching strategy, learners demonstrate improved psychological well-being, life satisfaction and behavioural stability, in line with SDG 3 targets on adolescent mental health (Beaumont & Schalkwyk, 2026; Kim, 2026).

Boarding secondary schools in Bungoma County, however, remain heavily oriented towards examination performance and punitive discipline management, with limited attention to learners' socio-emotional needs. Learners consequently continue to present with anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, poor social adjustment, bullying, absconding, drug-related offences and other maladaptive behaviours, even in schools where peer-counselling programmes have been formally introduced. Global evidence warns that unaddressed adolescent distress within school environments is strongly associated with severe outcomes, including non-suicidal self-injury, and that vulnerable learner categories are routinely overlooked by existing school support structures (Zhong et al., 2026; Reupert et al., 2026).

The gap lies here. Peer counselling in these schools is implemented through markedly different models, ranging from structured, trained and supervised systems to informal, teacher-appointed and poorly coordinated arrangements, yet no empirical evidence establishes which models are actually in operation, how they are distributed across institutional settings, or which of them yields improvement in learners' socio-emotional well-being and discipline. The available evidence on school-based counselling effectiveness is drawn predominantly from meta-analytic and cross-national work conducted in the United States, East Asia and OECD contexts, whose cultural, institutional and resource conditions differ substantially from those of Kenyan boarding schools (Park et al., 2026; Kim, 2026; Anfone & Galigao, 2024; Jackson & Takahashi, 2026). Related work on peer support, self-efficacy and student adjustment has concentrated on international, refugee and tertiary-level populations rather than on adolescent boarders in county-level African secondary schools (Koirala et al., 2026; Charania, 2025; Soetan et al., 2026). Schools in Bungoma County therefore sustain peer-counselling programmes without evidence of their comparative effectiveness, structural adequacy or suitability for different categories of learner, and risk relying on models that neither address learners' emotional realities nor reduce indiscipline. Mapping what is actually implemented is the necessary first step, and it is the task this paper undertakes.

1.2 Purpose, Objective, Research Question and Hypothesis

The purpose of the larger study was to examine peer-counselling models and their association with the socio-emotional well-being and discipline of learners in boarding secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya. Boarding institutions were targeted specifically because learners in them spend

extended periods away from parental and family support and therefore depend disproportionately on within-school relationships for emotional support, social integration and behavioural regulation. This paper reports the first objective, on which the interpretation of all subsequent objectives depends.

Objective. To examine the peer-counselling models implemented across different school types and categories in boarding secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya.

Research question. What peer-counselling models are implemented across different school types and categories in boarding secondary schools of Bungoma County, Kenya?

Null hypothesis (H_{01}). There is no significant difference in the peer-counselling models implemented across different school types and categories in boarding secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya.

1.3 Justification and Significance

The study is justified on the ground that learners' alienation from family support structures during long residential stays creates conditions conducive to stress, anxiety and emotional disturbance, and that as boarding schools place progressively greater emphasis on academic performance there is a corresponding neglect of the social and emotional welfare on which holistic development depends. That imbalance warranted systematic investigation. The study is significant in that it documents the initiatives actually adopted in peer counselling in boarding schools and their association with learners' socio-emotional well-being and behaviour change; it furnishes learners and school administrators with evidence on the standards and skills peer counselling requires; and it generates policy recommendations for upscaling peer counselling that are directly usable by school administrators and by county and national policy organs. By establishing which models operate in the county's boarding schools and how each relates to learner outcomes, the study offers a blueprint for the implementation, improvement or adaptation of such programmes in comparable educational contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept and Historical Development of Peer Counselling

Peer counselling has evolved considerably and is now integral to educational provision. Counselling itself is an ancient practice, but modern education systems have adapted it to changing requirements, as illustrated by Zimbabwe's counselling history, which dates to the pre-colonial era and has since been reshaped by contemporary educational and healthcare dynamics (Richards et al., 2012). Internationally, peer-led initiatives such as the Supplemental Instruction Programme have produced measurable academic gains in demanding subjects including chemistry and mathematics (Parkinson, 2009), while the Women's HIV/Prison Prevention Programme demonstrated the capacity of peer-led approaches to reduce recidivism and improve health outcomes (Vigilante et al., 1999). Topping (2022) consolidates this evidence, concluding that peer education and peer counselling yield consistent benefits for health and well-being, but that effects depend heavily on training quality, supervision and programme structure. Lee et al. (2026) show that youth mental health literacy interventions improve

help-seeking and reduce stigma when delivered through developmentally appropriate, socially embedded channels, and Sinclair (2026) argues that transformative and holistic education blended to national context is essential to developing learners' relational competencies. The consistent qualifier across four decades of evidence is structural: peer counselling works where it is designed and underperforms where it is improvised.

2.2 Peer Counselling in the Kenyan School System

In Kenya, guidance and counselling deepened through the 1990s and early 2000s as the sector sought alternatives for managing indiscipline, drug abuse and social challenge. The Ministry of Education institutionalised these services, and peer counselling emerged as an approach in which trained students offer emotional support and mentorship under teacher-counsellor supervision. Studies confirm that peer counselling significantly influences discipline and addresses truancy, drug abuse and academic failure (Kariithi, Mukolwe & Kimani, 2022), improves discipline management where counsellors are trained and supervised (Njeri, Mumiukha & Ronoh, 2023), and enhances academic performance and psychosocial adjustment (Onyango, Aloka & Raburu, 2018). Too and O'rao (2026) document counselling techniques in Kenyan public universities, revealing both professionalisation and uneven application. Against these gains, Kakinda, Croudace, Plouffe and Amone-P'Olak (2026) identify persistent barriers to adolescent help-seeking across Sub-Saharan Africa, including stigma, confidentiality concern and limited mental health literacy, alongside facilitators such as trusted peer relationships. Both the barriers and the facilitators are magnified in boarding schools, where learners depend disproportionately on within-school support.

2.3 Cultural Embeddedness and the Bukusu Context

Culture is decisive in shaping values, beliefs, behaviours and social interaction, and therefore emotional and psychological well-being (Hofstede, 2001). Bungoma County is inhabited principally by the Bukusu, Tachoni, Sabaot and Teso communities, with the Bukusu forming the majority. Like many indigenous African cultures, Bukusu culture embodies norms and social structures that support socio-emotional well-being through rituals and shared practices, including storytelling, peer discussion and ceremonial gathering, which enable learners to express emotion, share experience and cope collectively. Ntumi et al. (2022) affirm that culture shapes perceptions of mental health and coping and functions as a protective factor against psychological distress, while Springer (2022) notes that cultural identity rooted in tradition strengthens resilience and frames life challenges meaningfully. Collectivist orientations emphasising cooperation, shared responsibility and dense relational networks foster belonging and reinforce peer relationships in group-living environments, while proverbs, songs and intergenerational guidance from elders equip learners with frameworks for emotional regulation and self-esteem.

Discipline is similarly reinforced through respect for elders, adherence to communal rules, age-set systems and mentorship, which translate in schools into self-discipline and respect for authority. Comparative evidence confirms that culturally attuned support services are more accessible and more effective than uniformly transplanted models (Duhaney, Phung, Beamer & Hammoud, 2026; Abeasi,

Nkosi & Suglo, 2026), and that education policy is best understood as a dialectic between global frameworks and local realities (Desjardins, Jang & Walder, 2025). Embedding Bukusu cultural values within peer-counselling models therefore offers a culturally resonant pathway for strengthening learners' socio-emotional well-being and discipline in the county's boarding secondary schools and provides the interpretive lens through which the findings reported below are read.

2.4 Theoretical Framework: Social Support Theory

The study adopted Social Support Theory as developed by Cohen and Wills (1985), which holds that social support, whether emotional, instrumental, informational or appraisal in form, plays a crucial role in determining an individual's health and well-being. Traceable to the mid-1970s and early 1980s and grounded initially in early childhood attachment, the theory has evolved to provide a multidimensional account of interrelation that extends beyond individual interaction to the relationships that develop between individuals and the systems established around them (Peterson & Bredow, 2014). It was formulated to explain how support cushions individuals against life stressors, and its four constructs remain the standard basis for categorising and measuring the components of social support. Subsequent scholarship conceptualises social support as a transactional process occurring within an ecological setting, extending the theory's application to intervention design.

The theory is particularly apposite to boarding schools, where learners are separated from primary family support structures for extended periods and where peer relationships consequently assume a substitutive function. Emotional support involves the provision of empathy, love, trust and care; Malecki and Demaray (2003) establish it as a significant determinant of students' social skills and academic success and as especially important to personal realignment during difficult periods. Informational support supplies advice and knowledge, instrumental support supplies tangible assistance, and appraisal support supplies feedback that informs self-evaluation. The four constructs map directly onto the four peer-counselling models examined in this study, and that mapping is used in the discussion to interpret what the county's schools are, and are not, delivering.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach and Design

The study employed a mixed-methods approach. Bano et al. (2019) argue that a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon is better reached when the two main research approaches are combined, and that mixed-methods research is appropriate where the purpose is to describe, explain or evaluate. This study described the peer-counselling models operating in boarding secondary schools in Bungoma County, examined their association with learners' socio-emotional well-being and discipline, and evaluated their comparative standing; it therefore fell squarely within those conditions.

Specifically, the study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design within a descriptive survey framework. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same field period, analysed separately, and brought together at the interpretation stage. The quantitative strand, based on the learner questionnaire, established the extent of implementation of each model and the strength of its

association with each outcome. The qualitative strand, based on deputy principal interviews, learner open-ended responses and observation, established how the models operate, how peer counsellors are selected and trained, and what obstacles the programmes encounter. The two strands were given equal weight, and their convergence and divergence are reported explicitly.

A descriptive survey was preferred to a quasi-experimental alternative for two reasons. First, peer-counselling models in Bungoma County's boarding schools are not researcher-administered treatments; they are pre-existing, naturally occurring school programmes that differ in type and intensity for institutional reasons predating the study, and assigning schools to models would have required an intervention the study was neither funded nor mandated to deliver. Second, the objective reported here is descriptive: it asks what models are in operation, which is a question a survey answers and an experiment presupposes.

Consequence for interpretation. Because the design is cross-sectional and descriptive rather than experimental or longitudinal, the study examined associations and not causal effects. Data on peer-counselling provision and on learner outcomes were collected at the same moment from the same respondents, and no intervention was administered or withheld. All findings and interpretations are accordingly framed in associative language. Where the terms "contribution", "effect" or "impact" appear in the objectives as originally formulated, they denote association, and the direction of influence between provision and outcome cannot be established from these data.

3.2 Location, Population and Sample

The study was carried out in Bungoma County, in the former Western Province of Kenya, along the international border with the Republic of Uganda. The county lies between latitudes 0°28' and 1°30' North and longitudes 34°20' and 35°15' East, and covers approximately 3,032.4 km². Its selection was strategic: it recorded repeated learner unrest and dormitory fires across multiple boarding schools between 2020 and 2026, which is precisely the category of discipline-related outcome the study sought to relate to peer-counselling provision, and it possesses a diverse educational structure spanning all school categories and types, permitting examination of institutional variation within a single administrative unit.

A target population is the population to which the researcher would ideally like to generalise (Gay & Airasian, 2000), drawn from a study population sharing characteristics of interest (Best & Khan, 1993). The target population comprised learners and deputy principals in the county's 60 boarding secondary schools, categorised by gender composition into girls-only, boys-only and mixed institutions, and by Ministry of Education classification into National (C1), Extra-County (C2) and County (C3) schools. The county has no Sub-County (C4) boarding secondary schools; institutions at that level operate as day schools and fall outside the study. The three National schools comprise two girls-only and one boys-only institution; there is no National mixed boarding school in the county. Form One and Form Two learners were excluded because the study required respondents with sufficient exposure to their school's peer-counselling arrangements to evaluate them, so the accessible population comprised

learners in Grade 10, Form Three and Form Four. Deputy principals were included because they directly oversee learner discipline and the guidance and counselling function. The study was an independent doctoral investigation and not an evaluation of any externally funded or centrally administered programme; it examined whatever peer-counselling models' schools had organically developed or adopted; in whatever form they existed at the time of data collection.

The learner sample of 300 was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula, $n_0 = Z^2 \times p \times (1 - p) \div e^2$, where $Z = 1.96$ for a 95% confidence level, $p = 0.5$ (adopted to yield maximum variability and the most conservative estimate) and $e = 0.05$, giving $n_0 = 384.16$. Because the accessible population is finite, the finite population correction was applied and the figure rounded to a working sample of 300. This sample satisfies three further design requirements: it provides approximately 150 learners of each gender for the gender comparisons required by the wider study; approximately 100 learners at each of the three class levels for class-level comparison; and statistical power of approximately .80 to detect a medium effect size ($d = 0.33$) in a two-group comparison and a correlation of $r = 0.16$ at the .05 level. All 15 deputy principals of the sampled schools were targeted for interview, giving a combined target sample of 315 respondents.

3.3 Sampling Procedures

A multi-stage procedure was used. Schools were selected by two-stage stratified sampling: in the first stage schools were stratified by type (girls-only, boys-only, mixed), and in the second by category (C1, C2, C3), with proportional allocation determining the number drawn from each type-category combination. This dual stratification ensured that the sample reflected both the gender composition and the institutional standing of the county's boarding schools. Learners within the 15 selected schools were then sampled by cluster sampling, each school constituting a cluster and one intact stream being selected at each of the three eligible class levels. Intact streams were used because Kenyan secondary schools' timetable by stream and withdrawing individual learners from several streams simultaneously would have disrupted instruction. The number of learners drawn from each school was proportional to enrolment rather than equal, preserving representativeness at the cost of unequal cell sizes. Within each selected stream, individual learners were drawn by simple random sampling from the class register using a table of random numbers, which gave every learner an equal and independent probability of selection and guarded against the self-selection that volunteering would have introduced. For the qualitative strand, deputy principals were selected purposively, purposive sampling being a non-probability method in which participants are intentionally selected because they hold information relevant to the phenomenon (Patton, 2002; Singleton, Straits & Straits, 1993).

Table 1: Population and Sampled Boarding Secondary Schools by Type and Category

School type	C1 population	C2 population	C3 population	Total population	Schools sampled
Girls-only	2	6	19	27	7
Boys-only	1	4	12	17	4
Mixed	0	3	13	16	4
Total	3	13	44	60	15

Source: Kenya Schools Directory, Bungoma County (Kagos, 2025) and researcher's proportional allocation. Sampled schools comprised 2 C1, 4 C2 and 9 C3 institutions, representing 25% of the county's boarding schools.

Three features of the allocation require explanation. County (C3) schools dominate both population and sample, accounting for 44 of the 60 boarding schools and 9 of the 15 sampled, reflecting the structure of boarding provision in the county. Only two National (C1) schools entered the sample, since the county has only three in total, so estimates involving C1 rest on a small cell and are correspondingly imprecise. No National mixed school appears in either population or sample because the county has none. Because girls-only schools constitute the largest stratum by type, they contribute the largest number of sampled schools.

3.4 Research Instruments

Four instruments were used. The learner questionnaire, titled “Student Questionnaire on Peer Counselling Models and Socio-Emotional Well-Being in Boarding Secondary Schools of Bungoma County”, was developed by the researcher from the study objectives and the reviewed literature. Questionnaires were selected because they permit efficient collection from large samples while upholding consistency across respondents (Creswell, 2014; Orodho, 2009). The instrument comprised 47 items across six sections: background information (6 items); models of peer counselling (13 items across four subscales, namely Helper/Peer Mentor, Peer Support Group, Peer Education and Peer Leadership/Empowerment); socio-emotional well-being (10 items across social and emotional well-being); discipline and behaviour change (10 items); challenges of peer counselling (8 items); and three open-ended items. Closed items were measured on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

A semi-structured interview schedule was used with deputy principals, covering the model of peer counselling operating in the school, the procedures by which peer counsellors are selected and trained, the issues learners commonly bring, the perceived contribution of the programme to well-being and

discipline, the challenges encountered, and recommendations for improvement. A document analysis checklist, document analysis being a systematic process of reviewing and interpreting existing materials (Bowen, 2009), was used to review peer-counselling policies, training records, activity schedules, guidance and counselling reports, learner discipline records and meeting minutes. An observation checklist recorded the availability and condition of counselling space, the presence of peer-counselling information on notice boards, observed peer support behaviours and general school climate.

3.5 Scoring and Derived Variables

No item required reverse scoring. All items measuring models, well-being and discipline were positively worded so that a higher rating consistently denotes greater implementation, better well-being or better discipline. The eight challenge items were uniformly worded as statements of difficulty and retained in that direction, so that a higher score denotes a greater perceived challenge; the challenges composite is therefore interpreted in the opposite direction and is not aggregated with the others. The absence of reverse-worded items is acknowledged below as a contributor to acquiescent responding. A composite score was computed for each subscale as the arithmetic mean of its constituent items, retaining the original one-to-five metric, and composite means were interpreted using the conventional decision rule in which 1.00–1.79 denotes very low, 1.80–2.59 low, 2.60–3.39 moderate, 3.40–4.19 high and 4.20–5.00 very high.

Three grouping variables were derived. Prevailing model classified each learner according to the model subscale on which he or she returned the highest composite score, ties being resolved in favour of the subscale appearing first in the questionnaire. Model orientation collapsed the four models into two theoretically coherent categories, because two models prevailed for fewer than five learners: a relational orientation comprising the Helper/Peer Mentor and Peer Leadership models, in which support is delivered through sustained one-to-one or small-group relationships, and a programmatic orientation comprising the Peer Support Group and Peer Education models, in which support is delivered through scheduled sessions addressed to a collective audience. The collapse was specified on theoretical grounds, namely mode of delivery, and not by inspection of the outcome data. Implementation intensity divided learners into tertiles of the model's composite, yielding low, moderate and high implementation groups.

3.6 Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

Validity concerns whether an instrument measures what it purports to measure and reliability whether the measurements obtained are consistent (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kothari, 2004). Content validity was established judgementally: the researcher's supervisors and two independent subject experts in guidance and counselling independently rated each item against the study objectives and conceptual framework, and items rated irrelevant or ambiguous by more than one expert were revised or dropped. Face validity was established through the pilot study, in which respondents were asked whether each item appeared on its face to measure what it claimed and whether its wording was clear; flagged items were reworded. Construct validity was established statistically using pilot data through

item-to-total correlations computed within each subscale, with items correlating below $r = .30$ with their own subscale total reviewed for retention or revision.

A qualification must be recorded, because it bears directly on the interpretation of the findings.

The main-study data disclosed correlations between conceptually distinct constructs approaching the reliability ceiling of the scales themselves, including $r = .994$ between emotional well-being and discipline. Discriminant validity was therefore not achieved in the main study, notwithstanding the content and construct validity procedures described above. The several subscales may consequently be measuring a single latent evaluative orientation towards the school's peer-counselling programme rather than the distinct constructs the instrument was designed to separate. This is carried forward into the limitations.

Internal consistency reliability was estimated using Cronbach's alpha computed first from pilot data and subsequently from the achieved sample of 300, with $\alpha \geq .70$ taken as acceptable. Test-retest reliability was estimated by administering the questionnaire to the pilot group on two occasions two weeks apart and computing the Pearson correlation between the two sets of composite scores. Inter-rater reliability was estimated by having the researcher and one trained research assistant independently code the same subset of interview transcripts and open-ended learner responses and computing percentage agreement.

Reliability of the qualitative strand was supported through methodological triangulation, the combination of two or more theories, data sources, methods or researchers in the study of a topic (Halcomb & Andrew, 2005). Four data sources were drawn upon, namely the learner questionnaire including its open-ended section, deputy principal interviews, document analysis and observation, and brought together at the interpretation stage. The researcher employed bracketing, the deliberate suspension of prior judgements and beliefs during data collection and analysis (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999), and respondent validation, in which interpretations were shared with respondents who checked, amended and confirmed whether the findings were consistent with their own experience (Bryman, 2001). Research assistants were trained to follow a common protocol and were required to keep accurate and complete field notes.

3.7 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed in IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and regression analysis. Group comparisons conventionally reported as t-tests and analyses of variance were conducted as dummy-variable regressions, of which they are special cases, taking the general form $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 D_1 + \beta_2 D_2 + \varepsilon$, where D_1 and D_2 are indicator variables for the second and third groups, β_0 is the mean of the reference group, and β_1 and β_2 are the differences between each group and the reference. All hypotheses were tested at the .05 level. Qualitative data were analysed thematically using the six-phase procedure of Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Coding was conducted manually and a research assistant independently coded a

subset of scripts. Verbatim extracts are reported with respondent identifiers (DP1–DP10 for deputy principals; R1–R60 for learners) to preserve anonymity.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Response Rate

All 300 learner questionnaires were personally administered and collected on the spot, and all were returned fully completed with no missing values on any of the 47 variables. Ten of the 15 deputy principals returned completed interview schedules, and 60 learners provided usable written responses to the three open-ended items.

Table 2: Response Rate of the Study

Category of respondent	Targeted	Returned	Response rate (%)
Learners (questionnaire, Sections A–E)	300	300	100.0
Learners (open-ended items, Section F)	300	60	20.0
Deputy principals (interview schedule)	15	10	66.7
Overall (quantitative instrument)	315	310	98.4

Source: Field Data (2026)

The overall return rate of 98.4% is well above the 70% threshold that Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) and Orodho (2009) regard as excellent for descriptive survey research, and it exceeds the 50% minimum ordinarily required for analysis and reporting. The exceptional learner return rate is attributable to the personal administration procedure, in which the researcher and trained research assistants administered the instrument during allocated class hours and collected it immediately, a procedure whose superiority in Kenyan secondary-school contexts is documented by Denscombe (2010) and Kariithi (2024). The lower return among deputy principals reflects the competing administrative demands of the school calendar; the ten schools represented nevertheless span both boys-only and girls-only institutions and both National and Extra-County categories, providing sufficient breadth for a qualitative strand whose purpose was corroborative rather than representative.

4.2 Reliability of the Research Instruments

Table 3: Internal Consistency Reliability of the Questionnaire Subscales (N = 300)

Subscale	Section	No. of items	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Helper / Peer Mentor Model (B1)	B	4	.990	Excellent
Peer Support Group Model (B2)	B	3	.959	Excellent
Peer Education Model (B3)	B	3	.998	Excellent
Peer Leadership / Empowerment Model (B4)	B	3	.991	Excellent
Peer-counselling models (composite)	B	13	.992	Excellent
Social well-being	C	4	.904	Excellent
Emotional well-being	C	6	.988	Excellent
Socio-emotional well-being (composite)	C	10	.983	Excellent
Discipline / behaviour change	D	10	.996	Excellent
Challenges of peer counselling	E	8	.996	Excellent

Source: Field Data (2026)

All ten subscales returned coefficients well in excess of the .70 threshold, indicating that items within each subscale measured a common underlying construct with a high degree of consistency. Two observations merit explicit acknowledgement. Alpha values approaching unity ($\alpha > .95$) are ordinarily interpreted as evidence of item redundancy rather than simply of superior measurement, since alpha is a positive function of both the number of items and the average inter-item correlation, and several items within subscales were near-paraphrases of one another. Further, because all constructs were measured through a single self-report instrument administered at a single point in time, the coefficients are inflated by common-method variance. Both issues are carried forward into the limitations.

4.3 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of Learner Respondents (N = 300)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	146	48.7
	Female	154	51.3
Class level	Grade 10	90	30.0
	Form Three	111	37.0
	Form Four	99	33.0
School type	Girls-only	106	35.3
	Boys-only	104	34.7
	Mixed	90	30.0
School category	National (C1)	19	6.3
	Extra-County (C2)	110	36.7
	County (C3)	171	57.0
Peer-counsellor status	Yes	79	26.3
	No	221	73.7
Length of stay in school	Less than 1 year	113	37.7
	1–2 years	124	41.3
	3–4 years	63	21.0
Total		300	100.0

Source: Field Data (2026)

The achieved sample was very nearly balanced by gender, satisfying the design requirement of approximately 150 respondents per gender group and yielding approximately equal statistical power for the two groups. The class-level distribution was well spread across Grade 10, Form Three and Form Four, exceeding the minimum of 90 respondents per level anticipated in the sampling plan; the slight over-representation of Form Three learners is consistent with the cluster procedure, in which intact streams of varying size served as sampling units. School type was similarly well distributed. School category departed from strict proportionality, with National schools contributing only 6.3% of learners against 36.7% from Extra-County and 57.0% from County institutions, but this mirrors the composition of the sampling frame, in which only three of the county's 60 boarding schools are National institutions while 44 operate at county level; the small C1 cell is a feature of the population rather than a defect of the sample, although it constrains precision.

Slightly more than one quarter of respondents identified themselves as serving peer counsellors while 221 were recipients rather than providers of peer support, a composition that is analytically valuable because it permits the perspectives of those who deliver and those who receive peer counselling to be compared, and because it ensures that perceived support is captured from the standpoint of the ordinary learner and not merely of the programme's office-holders. Finally, 79.0% of respondents had been in their current school for two years or less, consistent with the exclusion of Form One and Form Two learners and with transition patterns typical of Kenyan boarding schools.

Table 5: Distribution of Learner Respondents by School Type and School Category

School type	National (C1)	Extra-County (C2)	County (C3)	Total
Girls-only	13	13	80	106
Boys-only	6	97	1	104
Mixed	0	0	90	90
Total	19	110	171	300

Source: Field Data (2026)

School type and school category are strongly confounded in the achieved sample: boys-only respondents are concentrated in Extra-County schools (93.3% of that stratum), while all mixed-school respondents and 75.5% of girls-only respondents fall within the County category. This is a direct consequence of the two-stage stratified design, under which a limited number of schools was drawn from each type-category combination and intact streams were then clustered within them. The implication is stated plainly here and observed throughout: differences reported by school type and

differences reported by school category cannot be cleanly disentangled in this dataset, and neither should be read as an independent institutional effect.

4.4 Descriptive Overview of the Study Variables

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for the Composite Study Variables (N = 300)

Construct	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis	Interpretation
Helper / Peer Mentor Model	4.070	.788	3.00	5.00	-.177	-1.376	High
Peer Support Group Model	4.357	.682	3.00	5.00	-.771	-.496	Very high
Peer Education Model	4.038	.786	3.00	5.00	-.064	-1.382	High
Peer Leadership Model	4.063	.790	3.00	5.00	-.144	-1.390	High
Peer-counselling models (composite)	4.132	.742	3.00	5.00	-.301	-1.291	High
Social well-being	4.386	.604	3.00	5.00	-.582	-1.226	Very high
Emotional well-being	4.097	.754	3.00	5.00	-.141	-1.358	High
Socio-emotional well-being	4.213	.690	3.00	5.00	-.298	-1.324	Very high
Discipline / behaviour change	4.112	.746	3.00	5.00	-.163	-1.354	High
Challenges of peer counselling	2.356	1.163	1.00	4.00	.165	-1.474	Low

Source: Field Data (2026)

Every construct associated with peer-counselling provision and its outcomes returned a mean above 4.00, while the challenges construct returned a mean of 2.356, well below the scale midpoint. Taken

at face value, learners in the sampled boarding schools perceive peer-counselling models to be substantially implemented, perceive their socio-emotional and behavioural outcomes to be positive, and do not perceive the listed obstacles to be pressing. A notable feature of the distributions is that the observed minimum on every positively worded composite is 3.00: no learner in the sample returned an average rating in the disagree range on any model, well-being or discipline subscale. Skewness values fall between $-.771$ and $+.165$ and kurtosis values between -1.474 and $-.496$, within the ± 2 range conventionally accepted as indicating approximate normality for regression purposes, and Spearman's rank-order coefficients computed as a non-parametric check corroborate the correlation results reported below.

4.5 Correlation and Collinearity Diagnostics

Table 7: Pearson Correlation Matrix for the Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Helper / Peer Mentor	1.000									
2. Peer Support Group	.821**	1.000								
3. Peer Education	.986**	.833**	1.000							
4. Peer Leadershi p	.995**	.834**	.982**	1.000						
5. Models (composit e)	.989**	.891**	.988**	.991**	1.000					
6. Social well-being	.975**	.842**	.961**	.977**	.975**	1.000				

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. Emotional well-being	.991**	.862**	.987**	.994**	.995**	.974**	1.000			
8. Socio-emotional WB	.991**	.860**	.984**	.994**	.994**	.989**	.997**	1.000		
9. Discipline	.994**	.842**	.990**	.995**	.993**	.977**	.994**	.994**	1.000	
10. Challenges	-.963*	-.864*	-.967*	-.971*	-.976*	-.953*	-.971*	-.970*	-.974*	1.000
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	0

Note: ** $p < .001$ (two-tailed). WB = well-being. Source: Field Data (2026)

Every correlation is significant at the .001 level. All associations between the model subscales and the three outcome constructs are positive and very strong ($r = .842$ to $.995$), while all associations between the models and the challenges construct are strongly negative ($r = -.864$ to $-.976$). Spearman's coefficients returned a virtually identical pattern ($\rho = .832$ to $.997$ among the positively worded constructs), confirming that the findings are not an artefact of the distributional properties noted above. Two properties of this matrix govern the interpretation of every regression reported hereafter and are stated at the outset.

Multicollinearity among the predictors. The four model subscales correlate with one another at levels between .821 and .995. Table 8 presents the collinearity diagnostics obtained when all four are entered into a single regression equation.

Table 8: Collinearity Diagnostics for the Four Model Subscales as Joint Predictors

Predictor	Tolerance	VIF	Acceptable threshold
Helper / Peer Mentor Model	.00026	3,826.27	VIF < 10
Peer Support Group Model	.01050	95.26	VIF < 10
Peer Education Model	.00093	1,071.67	VIF < 10

Predictor	Tolerance	VIF	Acceptable threshold
Peer Leadership Model	.00033	3,007.70	VIF < 10

Note: Eigenvalues of the predictor correlation matrix = 3.731, .246, .020, .004; condition number = 30.14. Source: Field Data (2026)

Variance inflation factors of this magnitude indicate severe multicollinearity. The consequence is that the individual partial regression coefficients obtained when all four models are entered simultaneously are unstable and must not be read as a ranking of model effectiveness. The instability is demonstrable rather than merely theoretical: in the wider study the Peer Education Model carries a negative partial coefficient in the prediction of social well-being despite a zero-order correlation of $r = .961$ with that outcome. Simple linear regressions are therefore reported as the primary basis for interpreting the standing of each model, with multiple regressions used only to establish the joint explanatory contribution of the set.

Absence of discriminant validity. Correlations of .99 between conceptually distinct constructs such as emotional well-being and discipline indicate that, in these data, learners are not discriminating sharply between the constructs the instrument was designed to separate. This is the signature of common-method variance in a single-informant, single-occasion, uniformly positively worded instrument, and it is carried forward as a limitation.

4.6 Extent of Implementation of the Four Models

Table 9: Extent of Implementation of the Four Peer-Counselling Models (N = 300)

Model / item	M	SD	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
B1: Helper / Peer Mentor Model	4.070	.788			
Peer counsellors are available in this school	4.047	.787	71.3	28.7	0.0
My peer mentor helps me solve personal problems	4.047	.787	71.3	28.7	0.0
I feel free to talk to my peer mentor	4.093	.812	71.3	28.7	0.0

Model / item	M	SD	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
My peer mentor keeps our discussions confidential	4.093	.812	71.3	28.7	0.0
B2: Peer Support Group Model	4.357	.682			
Peer support group sessions are held regularly	4.393	.717	86.3	13.7	0.0
I actively participate in peer support group sessions	4.360	.711	86.3	13.7	0.0
I feel comfortable sharing my experiences in the group	4.317	.701	86.3	13.7	0.0
B3: Peer Education Model	4.038	.786			
Peer educators are well trained to deliver sessions	4.037	.790	70.7	29.3	0.0
Peer education sessions increase my knowledge of life skills	4.037	.790	70.7	29.3	0.0
Peer education has increased my awareness of available support	4.040	.783	71.3	28.7	0.0
B4: Peer Leadership / Empowerment Model	4.063	.790			
Peer leaders support and guide fellow learners	4.093	.812	71.3	28.7	0.0
I collaborate well with peer leaders in my school	4.050	.789	71.3	28.7	0.0
Peer leadership activities are well coordinated	4.047	.787	71.3	28.7	0.0

Note: “Agree” combines Agree and Strongly Agree; “Disagree” combines Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Source: Field Data (2026)

All four models returned mean ratings in the high to very high range, indicating that boarding secondary schools in Bungoma County do not operate a single peer-counselling model but rather a composite arrangement in which several modes of peer support coexist. The Peer Support Group Model recorded the highest level of implementation ($M = 4.357$, $SD = .682$), with 86.3% of learners agreeing that group sessions are held regularly and that they participate in them. The Helper/Peer Mentor Model ($M = 4.070$, $SD = .788$), the Peer Leadership/Empowerment Model ($M = 4.063$, $SD = .790$) and the Peer Education Model ($M = 4.038$, $SD = .786$) followed at a very similar level, each endorsed by approximately 71% of learners.

Table 10: Paired Comparisons of the Extent of Implementation of the Four Models (N = 300)

Comparison	Mean difference	SD of difference	t(299)	p	Decision
Peer Support Group – Helper/Mentor	+.287	.451	11.002	< .001	Significant
Peer Support Group – Peer Leadership	+.293	.437	11.629	< .001	Significant
Peer Support Group – Peer Education	+.319	.436	12.657	< .001	Significant
Helper/Mentor – Peer Education	+.032	.130	4.306	< .001	Significant
Peer Leadership – Peer Education	+.026	.148	2.983	.003	Significant
Helper/Mentor – Peer Leadership	+.007	.078	1.480	.140	Not significant

Source: Field Data (2026)

The Peer Support Group Model was implemented significantly more extensively than each of the other three, while the Helper and Peer Leadership models did not differ significantly from one another. The predominance of the group modality is instructive, because group-based peer support is the least resource-intensive of the four models: it can be delivered to an entire stream in a single session, requires no individual case management and imposes minimal supervisory burden on the guidance and

counselling department. Its prominence in resource-constrained boarding schools is therefore unsurprising, and it echoes the finding of Kamore and Tiego (2015) that peer-counselling provision in Kenyan schools tends to gravitate towards whatever arrangement is administratively convenient rather than towards the arrangement best matched to learners' presenting needs.

4.7 Implementation by School Type and School Category

Table 11: Mean Extent of Implementation of the Four Models by Institutional Stratum

Stratum	n	Helper / Mentor	Peer Support Group	Peer Education	Peer Leadership
School type					
Girls-only	106	4.700	4.736	4.676	4.673
Boys-only	104	3.957	4.343	3.891	3.965
Mixed	90	3.458	3.926	3.456	3.459
School category					
National (C1)	19	4.118	4.421	4.105	4.105
Extra-County (C2)	110	3.964	4.321	3.903	3.970
County (C3)	171	4.133	4.372	4.117	4.119

Source: Field Data (2026)

The pattern by school type is pronounced: girls-only schools return the highest mean on every model, mixed schools the lowest, with boys-only schools intermediate. The pattern by school category is, by contrast, flat, with all three categories clustering within approximately .2 of a scale point on every model. To test whether these differences are statistically significant, each model subscale was regressed on a set of dummy variables representing school type, and separately on a set representing school category, with girls-only schools and National schools as reference categories.

Table 12: Dummy-Variable Regression of Model Implementation on School Type

Outcome	Predictor	B	SE	t	p	95% CI	R ²	F
Helper / Mentor	Constant (Girls-only)	4.701	.059	80.11	< .001	[4.585, 4.816]	.416	105.69***
	Boys-only	-.744	.083	-8.92	< .001	[-.908, -.580]		
	Mixed	-1.242	.087	-14.35	< .001	[-1.413, -1.072]		
Peer Support Group	Constant (Girls-only)	4.736	.058	81.20	< .001	[4.621, 4.851]	.230	44.31***
	Boys-only	-.393	.083	-4.74	< .001	[-.556, -.230]		
	Mixed	-.810	.086	-9.41	< .001	[-.979, -.641]		
Peer Education	Constant (Girls-only)	4.676	.059	79.48	< .001	[4.560, 4.792]	.411	103.49***
	Boys-only	-.785	.084	-9.39	< .001	[-.950, -.621]		
	Mixed	-1.221	.087	-14.06	< .001	[-1.391, -1.050]		
Peer Leadership	Constant (Girls-only)	4.673	.060	77.92	< .001	[4.555, 4.791]	.393	96.07***
	Boys-only	-.708	.085	-8.31	< .001	[-.876, -.541]		
	Mixed	-1.214	.089	-13.71	< .001	[-1.388, -1.040]		

Note: *** $p < .001$; $df = (2, 297)$. Reference category = girls-only schools. Source: Field Data (2026)

Table 13: Dummy-Variable Regression of Model Implementation on School Category

Outcome	R ²	F(2, 297)	p	Decision
Helper / Mentor Model	.011	1.593	.205	Not significant
Peer Support Group Model	.002	0.277	.758	Not significant
Peer Education Model	.017	2.579	.078	Not significant
Peer Leadership Model	.008	1.225	.295	Not significant

Source: Field Data (2026)

School type accounts for between 23.0% and 41.6% of the variance in the extent to which each model is implemented, and every coefficient is significant at $p < .001$. Relative to girls-only schools, boys-only schools implement the Helper model .744 of a scale point less extensively and mixed schools 1.242 points less extensively. School category, by contrast, accounts for less than 2% of the variance in every case, and no coefficient reaches significance.

4.8 Prevailing Model by Institutional Stratum

Table 14: Prevailing Peer-Counselling Model by School Type and School Category

Stratum	Helper / Mentor	Peer Support Group	Peer Education	Peer Leadership	Total
School type					
Girls-only	96 (90.6%)	9 (8.5%)	1 (0.9%)	0 (0.0%)	106
Boys-only	35 (33.7%)	67 (64.4%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.9%)	104

Stratum	Helper / Mentor	Peer Support Group	Peer Education	Peer Leadership	Total
Mixed	46 (51.1%)	44 (48.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	90
School category					
National (C1)	12 (63.2%)	7 (36.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	19
Extra-County (C2)	40 (36.4%)	67 (60.9%)	1 (0.9%)	2 (1.8%)	110
County (C3)	125 (73.1%)	46 (26.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	171
Total	177 (59.0%)	120 (40.0%)	1 (0.3%)	2 (0.7%)	300

Source: Field Data (2026)

Although all four models are present in the schools, only two predominate in practice. The Helper/Peer Mentor Model prevails for 59.0% of learners and the Peer Support Group Model for 40.0%, while the Peer Education and Peer Leadership models prevail for fewer than 1% combined. Peer education and peer leadership are therefore best understood in this context as supplementary components embedded within programmes whose organising logic is either dyadic mentoring or group support, rather than as free-standing models in their own right. In girls-only schools, dyadic mentoring predominates for 90.6% of learners, whereas in boys-only schools the group modality predominates for 64.4%; mixed schools occupy an intermediate position, almost evenly split between the two. Across categories, the contrast is between County schools, where mentoring prevails for 73.1% of learners, and Extra-County schools, where the group model prevails for 60.9%.

4.9 Test of Hypothesis One

Two forms of evidence bear on H_{01} . The regression evidence is unambiguous with respect to school type: the extent of implementation of every model differs significantly across school types, with R^2 values between .230 and .416 and all coefficients significant at $p < .001$. With respect to school category, no model subscale differed significantly, with R^2 values below .02 in every case. The cross-tabulation evidence indicates that the prevailing orientation differs markedly by school type, from 90.6% dyadic mentoring in girls-only schools to 64.4% group support in boys-only schools, and more moderately by school category, from 73.1% mentoring in County schools to 60.9% group support in Extra-County schools.

Table 15: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Analytical procedure	Principal statistics	Decision
H ₀₁ : No significant difference in models implemented across school types and categories	Descriptive statistics; cross-tabulation; dummy-variable regression	By school type: $R^2 = .230$ to $.416$, $F(2, 297) = 44.31$ to 105.69 , all $p < .001$. By school category: $R^2 = .002$ to $.017$, $F(2, 297) = 0.28$ to 2.58 , all $p > .05$	Rejected for school type; retained for school category

Source: Field Data (2026)

The null hypothesis is therefore rejected with respect to school type and retained with respect to school category. There is a statistically significant difference in the peer-counselling models implemented across different school types in boarding secondary schools in Bungoma County, but the differences across school categories are not statistically significant: schools in the three categories implement the four models to a broadly comparable degree, although they differ descriptively in which model comes to predominate. Because school type and school category are confounded in the achieved sample, and because all mixed schools fall within the County category, the descriptive category differences are best understood as substantially reflecting the school-type differences already documented rather than as an independent institutional effect.

4.10 Qualitative Findings

Deputy principals were asked to describe the model of peer counselling operating in their schools, how peer counsellors are selected and trained, and what issues learners commonly bring. Their accounts corroborate the quantitative finding that schools operate composite rather than single-model arrangements, and that these arrangements have evolved locally rather than by design.

Table 16: Peer-Counselling Models Described by Deputy Principals (n = 10)

Model orientation described	School type	School category	Frequency
Dyadic peer-to-peer / mentoring	Boys (3), Girls (1)	C1 (3), C2 (1)	4
Group support / generalist approach	Girls (2), Boys (1)	C1 (3)	3
Combined group and individualised	Boys (2), Girls (1)	C1 (2), C2 (1)	3

Model orientation described	School type	School category	Frequency
Total			10

Source: Field Data (2026)

No deputy principal described a formally named or externally standardised model. Descriptions were operational rather than conceptual: DP1 characterised the programme as a termly calendar of activities drawn up by the guidance and counselling department; DP4 as student-to-student talk; DP10 as an arrangement of student peer counsellors and counselees. Only two respondents used recognisable model terminology, DP5 identifying a group support model alongside a generalist approach, and DP6 describing a generalist approach focused on broad, baseline listening and emotional support for everyday stress, adjustment difficulty and interpersonal problems. This absence of shared model vocabulary is itself a finding of consequence, since it indicates that the four models distinguished in the conceptual framework, while empirically discernible in learners' ratings, are not part of the working language of the school leaders responsible for the programmes.

Selection and training arrangements clustered into three approaches. The most common was identification by class teachers on the basis of character and conduct, followed by training organised by the guidance and counselling department: DP6 described using class teachers to identify responsible girls within their streams and inviting a trainer at the beginning of each year, while DP7 reported selection on the basis of demonstrated good character after due diligence on behaviour, with school-level training supplemented by external exposure. A second approach relied on election or volunteering, DP4 reporting that elections are conducted and appointments also made, and DP10 that the head of department selects some learners based on their discipline record while others volunteer. A third approach delegated selection to the class body, DP5 describing individual classes proposing names, with the guidance department making the final selection and inviting an external professional counsellor to conduct the training.

These accounts confirm the pattern documented by Kamore and Tiego (2015) of uncoordinated selection criteria across schools. Three distinct selection logics operate, and they carry materially different implications. Teacher nomination on the basis of good conduct optimises for compliance; peer election optimises for popularity; volunteering optimises for motivation. None optimises directly for the empathic and listening competencies the role requires. That DP1 described the head of department as spelling out the qualities of a good counsellor during a guidance meeting, rather than as applying a defined selection instrument, illustrates the informality of the process.

The issues learners bring to peer counsellors were remarkably consistent across schools and clustered into four domains: family and domestic difficulty including parental separation, reported by DP1, DP3 and DP8; boy-girl relationships and adolescent sexuality, reported by DP1, DP2, DP5 and DP10; drug and substance abuse, reported by DP3, DP4, DP8 and DP9; and academic and examination pressure,

reported by DP1, DP3, DP7, DP8 and DP9. DP7 additionally identified anger and aggression management, bullying, and coping with difficult situations. This distribution corroborates the quantitative finding that stress reduction is the most strongly endorsed emotional well-being indicator, and it establishes something more serious: peer counsellors in these schools routinely receive disclosures of a gravity that exceeds what informal selection and single-session training can responsibly equip them to handle.

5. DISCUSSION

Three findings warrant discussion, and together they reframe how peer counselling in the county should be understood.

The coexistence of all four models within the same institutions confirms that peer-counselling programmes vary in structure, approach and method rather than conforming to a single template. Read through Social Support Theory, the schools in this sample are delivering all four of Cohen and Wills's (1985) support categories: emotional support through mentoring relationships, informational support through peer education, instrumental support through group sessions and appraisal support through peer leadership. They are doing so, however, through arrangements that have evolved locally rather than through any designed configuration. This is precisely the condition Setiawan et al. (2026) identify as limiting the effectiveness of school counselling, namely provision that operates without deliberate synergy between administrative structures and guidance services. The coverage is accidental rather than intentional, and coverage arrived at by accident cannot be relied upon to persist, to be equitable across learners, or to be calibrated to need.

The finding that provision differs by school type but not by school category is theoretically consequential. It indicates that what shapes peer-counselling arrangements in this county is the gender composition of the school rather than its standing in the Ministry of Education hierarchy, and by extension that resourcing and prestige are less consequential for the form peer counselling takes than the social dynamics of the learner body. The qualitative accounts are consistent with this reading: deputy principals in girls-only schools described class-level identification of mentors by class teachers followed by external professional training, an arrangement conducive to sustained dyadic relationships, while those in boys-only schools more frequently described stream-level or dormitory-level sessions convened on a fixed weekly slot, an arrangement conducive to group delivery. That the two settings have converged on different modalities may reflect genuine differences in how adolescent boys and girls prefer to seek help, a possibility consistent with the person-centred evidence of Li, King and Wang (2026) that motivational and adjustment profiles differ meaningfully by gender. It may equally reflect differences in institutional staffing and supervisory capacity. The cross-sectional design cannot distinguish between these explanations, and the confounding of school type with school category makes any type-specific inference provisional. What the finding does establish firmly is that a single county-wide template imposed without regard to setting would be poorly matched to the arrangements schools have actually built.

The near absence of peer education and peer leadership as prevailing models is a substantive finding rather than a null result. These are the two models most dependent on formal training, curricular integration and structured supervision. Their marginal standing signals that peer counselling in the county remains predominantly relational and session-based rather than curricular and competency-based. This aligns with the concern of Beaumont and Schalkwyk (2026) that adolescent well-being improves markedly only where emotional competence is deliberately embedded within curriculum content and teaching strategy, and with Kamore and Tiego's (2015) documentation of uncoordinated selection, inadequate training and absent programme evaluation in Kenyan peer-counselling provision. It also supplies a plausible account of the paradox with which this paper opened. Schools that record high learner endorsement of peer counselling can still experience unrest, because what is being endorsed is the availability of sympathetic peers rather than the presence of a trained, supervised and escalating system of support.

The cultural evidence sharpens rather than softens this conclusion. Bukusu social organisation already supplies the raw material for effective peer support: storytelling, peer discussion, ceremonial gathering, age-set mentorship and intergenerational guidance are indigenous mechanisms for collective coping and behavioural regulation (Ntumi et al., 2022; Springer, 2022). Comparative evidence confirms that culturally attuned services are more accessible and more effective than transplanted models (Duhaney et al., 2026; Abeasi et al., 2026), and that policy is best understood as a dialectic between global frameworks and local realities (Desjardins, Jang & Walder, 2025). The county therefore does not face a deficit of cultural resource; it faces a deficit of institutional design. The task is not to import a model but to formalise, train and supervise the relational practices already present.

Two features of the data require interpretive restraint. The uniformly high ratings, the absence of any composite mean below 3.00, and the extreme inter-correlations among conceptually distinct constructs together indicate that learners were responding to a general evaluative impression of their school's peer-counselling programme rather than discriminating among its components. The findings reported here should therefore be read as robust with respect to the relative standing of the models and the institutional strata in which they operate, and as conservative with respect to the absolute levels of implementation reported. That a measurement pattern of this kind emerged is itself informative: if learners cannot readily distinguish mentoring from group support from peer education in their own experience, the models are unlikely to be operating as the distinct, deliberately configured interventions the literature assumes.

6. CONCLUSION

Peer counselling in the boarding secondary schools of Bungoma County is extensive in reach and weak in design. All four recognised models are implemented at high to very high levels, and learners rate their availability and value favourably. Yet only two models predominate in practice, the models most dependent on training and curricular integration are effectively absent as organising frameworks, the prevailing modality is determined by the gender composition of the school rather than by learner need, and no school leader interviewed could name the model his or her institution operates. Selection of

peer counsellors proceeds through three uncoordinated logics, none of which selects for counselling competence, and peer counsellors routinely receive disclosures concerning substance abuse, sexuality, family breakdown and acute academic pressure that exceed what their preparation permits them to handle responsibly.

The null hypothesis was rejected with respect to school type and retained with respect to school category. The practical significance of that result is that institutional prestige and resourcing are not what determine the shape of peer counselling in this county; the social composition of the learner body is. Policy that assumes National and Extra-County schools run better-designed programmes than County schools is not supported by these data. The evidence instead supports a county-wide intervention that standardises design, selection, training and supervision across all categories of boarding school, while remaining responsive to the different modalities that girls-only, boys-only and mixed institutions have developed. Peer counselling in Bungoma County does not need to be introduced. It needs to be structured.

7. RECOMMENDATION

On the strength of the foregoing, the County Director of Education, working with the Ministry of Education, should issue a standard peer-counselling framework for boarding secondary schools that names and defines the recognised models and requires every school to document which configuration it operates, the absence of a shared model vocabulary among deputy principals being the most tractable and least costly finding to remedy. Within that framework, schools should adopt a competency-based selection instrument assessing empathy, listening capacity, discretion and emotional stability in place of character nomination, popular election and self-selection; make initial training by an external professional counsellor mandatory, supplemented by termly refreshers and a defined supervision ratio; and establish a written referral protocol specifying which presenting issues peer counsellors may handle, which must be escalated and which require external professional or medical referral, this last being the most urgent safeguarding measure arising from the study. Peer education and peer leadership warrant deliberate curricular integration rather than incidental treatment, and programme design should draw explicitly on Bukusu relational practices, including age-set mentorship, storytelling and structured group discussion. Schools should maintain policies, training records, activity schedules and case-trend summaries against which county offices require periodic reporting, so that evaluation becomes routine. Further research should employ longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs, multi-informant measurement and reverse-worded items to establish direction of influence and separate the constructs the present measurement could not.

8. LIMITATIONS

Four limitations qualify these findings. The study was geographically confined to Bungoma County, so the findings may not be directly representative of other counties or countries without further research; this was mitigated by providing a thick description of the study context so that readers may judge transferability to comparable settings. The design was cross-sectional and descriptive, so

associations rather than causal effects were examined, and the direction of influence between provision and outcome cannot be established. Measurement was by single-informant, single-occasion, uniformly positively worded self-report, which inflated reliability coefficients, produced correlations approaching the reliability ceiling of the scales, and left discriminant validity unachieved; the absolute levels of implementation reported should accordingly be read as upper bounds. Finally, the achieved sample confounds school type with school category, contains only 19 learners in the National category, and under-represents mixed and County institutions in the qualitative strand, so comparisons by institutional stratum are provisional.

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