

## Inter-Disciplinary Training Approach of Counsellors in Kenya

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### Abstract

Interdisciplinary training approach is known to play a major role in enhancing teaching and learning in Educational institutions. There is therefore need to have a practical strategy for implementation of interdisciplinary training approach to facilitate training and preparation of counsellors in addressing emerging and complex counselling issues in the society today. The study sought to establish the relationship between interdisciplinary training and performance of students in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. A purposive sampling procedure was used to determine key informants. Therefore the study population included 52 diploma, 80 undergraduate 4th year and 52 masters students, 20 trainers from Kenya Association of Professional Counsellors and Tec Institute of Management, 2 heads of department, 17 lecturers from Kenyatta and Moi Universities and 17 counsellors from Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital. After piloting the instrument, data was collected using questionnaires, interview guide and observation checklist. Qualitative data was coded into categorical variables and quantitative data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v.17). The relationship variables were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and results presented using tables, bar chart and pie charts. Findings revealed that interdisciplinary programmes existed but only in a form of short interactive sessions. The major challenge facing the programme was that some professionals felt highly territorial about their disciplines hence felt threatened as new views of their subjects are promoted. Based on these findings the study recommended the development of policy guidelines to facilitate interdisciplinary education by focusing mainly on teaching processes that bring about collaborative competencies necessary for current and future health professionals.

**Key Words:** Interdisciplinary training, Discipline field, Psychological counseling, Counsellor, Kenya

## **1. Introduction**

Education is generally changing in terms of teaching, research and learning due to a subtle restructuring of knowledge in the twentieth century thus, moving from narrow to wider, more holistic education. At ever growing rates, students are pursuing courses at the interfaces of disciplines with intent to broadening their educational experiences. Currently there is a growing need among learners at various levels to gain knowledge and skills in one or more fields beyond their primary majors in order to view complex problems and solutions from a holistic and global perspective (Rustum, 2000). It is in this context that educators, researchers and practitioners are turning to inter-disciplinary approaches with the aim of providing ample opportunities to students to reflect upon the process of their problem solving and their insights on the relationship between knowledge base and skills of different disciplines (Stefanovic, 1996). Given this scenario, it is hardly surprising that inter-disciplinary is a concept of wide appeal.

Jacobs (1989) defines inter-disciplinary learning as a knowledge view and curriculum approach that consciously applies methodology and language from more than one discipline to examine a central theme, issue, problem, topic or experience. Along similar lines but with more granularity, Augsborg, (2005) explains that inter-disciplinary is most often used in educational circles when researchers from two or more disciplines pool their approaches and modify them so that they are better suited to the problem at hand, including the case of the team-taught course where students are required to understand a given subject in terms of multiple traditional disciplines. Klein (1990) concurs, contending that interdisciplinary implies a deeper degree of collaboration between team members and involves an effort to integrate and translate, at least to some degree, themes shared by several disciplines in order to propose solutions to complex problems in a flexible and open-minded way. The goal of such training is to develop the trainers' capacity for

interdisciplinary collaboration and to form teams around the needs of clients and population being served. However, findings from previous studies and literature reviewed have revealed a number of gaps in terms of developing student capacities to integrate or synthesize disciplinary knowledge and modes of thinking (AACU, 2005), thus the need to carry out this study.

The appreciation of inter-disciplinary is not entirely new to liberal arts education. Klein (2005) attests that roots of the concepts lie in a number of ideas that resonate through modern discourse—the ideas of a unified science, general knowledge, synthesis and the integration of knowledge. The history of science from the time of the earliest scholars abounds with examples of integration of knowledge from many research fields. Huber and Hutchings (1993:28) noted that the Greek philosopher Seneca held the view that education should produce citizens who could call their minds their own through study of the subjects and methods best suited for enlightened decision-making and judgments. From the foregoing discussion there is need for different fields such as social scientists, humanities and scientists to join in addressing complex problems that must be tackled simultaneously with deep knowledge from different perspectives.

Collaboration emanates from the understanding that complex psychological health needs of the society exceed the capability of any single discipline therefore, the appreciation of roles and contributions that each discipline brings to the care delivery experience. Such professional socialization and the ability to work together is the result of shared educational and practical experience designed to enhance the counselling practice.

However, while interdisciplinary education has been recommended as part of a holistic, cooperative agenda for health care, institutions have traditionally emphasized and rewarded discipline-specific teaching and research. In fact, very few learning institutions for health professionals include any interdisciplinary experiences, either classroom or clinical, as part of

their course work (Larson, 1995). Consequently, learners are denied an opportunity to pursue knowledge and skills beyond their primary majors hence, unable to view complex problems and solutions from a holistic and global perspective. Furthermore, rigorous studies have not yet been conducted to evaluate the impact of inter-disciplinary training of counsellor; most studies have focused mainly on tangible outcomes such as grants, papers and patents in health professions in the United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US). This is a critical gap in the examination of interdisciplinarity. The main objective of this study was to establish the extent of implementation of the inter-disciplinary approach in training and practice of counsellors caring for persons with emotional and psychological needs.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1 Research Design.**

A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted whereby data was collected in order to answer questions concerning variables of this study. The study employed a mixed methods approach which permits the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data in the same study. Quantitative data was obtained to achieve demographic information which elicited responses on age, sex, academic, professional and work experience. Quantitative approaches were used too, to obtain data concerned with the extent of implementation of interdisciplinary training approach and the relationship between interdisciplinary training and performance of students. A self administered questionnaire and an observation checklist were used to obtain data from respondents. Responses were analysed quantitatively and generated data which was presented in tables, bar and pie chart, clearly indicating responses in percentages.

Qualitative approaches were employed to obtain data to achieve the objective regarding barriers to interdisciplinary training approach. This was achieved through semi structured interviews and open ended questionnaires. Responses were coded into categorical variables. The researcher then established the relationships among these categories whereby themes were analysed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 17 for analysis.

## **2.2 Geographical Location of the Study**

This study was conducted in four institutions offering psychological counselling training programmes and one institution offering psychological counselling services to clients. These were: Moi University, Kenyatta University, Kenya Association of Professional Counsellors, Tec Institute of Management (Eldoret) and Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital (Department of psychological counselling).

## **2.3 Study Population**

The study population included: Heads of Department, lecturers, trainers, fourth year undergraduate and Masters Students in counselling programmes at Kenyatta and Moi University, diploma students and trainers from KAPC and Tec Institute of Management and, counsellors working at MTRH School of Nursing, department of psychological counselling. The study population in this study therefore constituted 2 Heads of Department, 44 lecturers, 80 undergraduate 4th year students, 52 postgraduate students, 20 trainers, 52 diploma students and 17 counsellors working at Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital, School of Nursing. The study targeted the entire lecturer, student and counselling population to obtain data on interdisciplinary training and media resources used in training counsellors. The entire population was used because they were directly involved in the teaching, learning and counselling programmes respectively.

## **2.4 Sample and Sampling Techniques**

Purposive sampling was used to identify the institutions involved in the study since this technique allowed the researcher to use the cases that had the required information with respect to the objective of this study. All the respondents thus, Heads of Department , lecturers, trainers, diploma, undergraduate masters students and counsellors in the counselling psychology programmes in the sampled institutions were handpicked because they possessed the required characteristics, that is, being involved in the psychological training and counseling programme.

## **2.5 Data Collection Instruments**

Self-administered questionnaire was used to gather information from lecturers, trainers, students and counsellors. The questionnaire comprised both open-ended and structured questions.

Face-to face interviews were conducted with the key informants of training and counselling institutions on the extent of implementation of inter-disciplinary approach in training and counselling. A semi-structured interview schedule with both structured and open-ended questions was conducted with a total of 5 interviewees comprising of Heads of Department and co-ordinators of psychological counseling programmes in the sampled institutions. The responses were recorded exactly as the respondent expressed by talking and gestures.

Piloting was conducted at Eden Training and Therapy Centre (Nairobi) and PCEA Kikuyu Referral Hospital. The pilot sample included 5 students, 3 trainers and 5 counsellors. Both construct and content validity techniques were used to validate data generated from the study. Cronbach alpha was used to calculate the reliability of the instruments and a coefficient value of 0.80 was found.

## **2.6 Data Collection Procedures**

After getting permit from the relevant authorities, data collection commenced. Initial visits were made to the training institutions and the health facility in order to explain the purpose of the study and make appointments.

## **2.7 Data Analysis Procedures**

Responses from interviews and open ended questionnaires constituted the bulk of qualitative data. Data analysis was achieved through initial coding and identification of patterns. The patterns that were related were grouped together into themes which were reported and interpreted. The researcher then established the relationships among these categories. Quantitative data was analysed by first measuring numerical values from which descriptions were made. The main purpose of using descriptive statistics was to enable the researcher to meaningfully describe a distribution of scores or measurements using a few indices or statistics. Data analysis technique consisted of calculation of mean scores, percentages and frequencies using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 17 for analysis. Finally, research questions with the degree of relationship between two variables were analysed using inferential statistics; Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The results were presented using tables, bar chart and pie chart.

## **3. Results and Findings**

### **3.1 Background Information of the Respondents.**

Respondents in this study involved 116 students composed of 38 (32.8%) males and 78 (67.2%) females. Lecturers who participated in this study were 6 (37.2%) males and 10 (62.5%) females whereas practisingcounsellors had 3 (33.3) males and 6 (66.7%) females. An implication of this

is that the majority of students, lecturers and counsellors involved in the counselling programme were female.

### **3.2 Qualifications of trainers and practicing counsellors**

With regard to the highest level of training the study established the following: diploma (18.8%), degree holders were (37.5%) followed by masters qualifications at (25%) and (18.8%) with PhD as their highest level of training. Results obtained from counsellors' academic qualifications revealed (11.1%) had diploma, (77.8%) degree and (11.1%) masters as their highest level of training. There was no counsellor with a PhD qualification. As far as the experience in years was concerned, only 1 (6.3%) had served for 10 years, 2 (12.5%) for 8 years, 1 (6.3%) had served for 7 years while those who had served for 6 years in their stations were only 2 (12.5%). The rest of the staff had served for less than 5 years in their current stations. The report also indicated that majority of practicing counsellors, 6 (66.7%) had served in their current station for approximately a period of two years while 2 (22.2%) had worked in their current station for an average of three years. Only 1 (11.1%) had 10 years working experience.

### **3.3 Inter-disciplinary approach in training and counselling practice.**

Participants were asked to state whether they were aware of any interdisciplinary programmes in their respective institutions. All the lecturers reported being fully aware of inter-disciplinary training programmes with the majority 7 (77.8) counsellors giving the same report. Counsellors who reported not being aware of the programmes were 2 (22.2%).

Respondents were further asked to state the extent to which they incorporated inter-disciplinary approach. From their responses, 6 (66.7%) counsellors confirmed often incorporating inter-disciplinary approach in counselling practice while 1 (11.1%) indicated a response of very often

with 2 (22.2%) respondents reporting not at all being involved in any of the inter-disciplinary programmes.

It was important to find out the benefits of inter-disciplinary approach in training and counselling practice. Both lecturers and counsellors were asked to state their responses. Almost all the respondents (93.8%) stated that inter-disciplinary counselling approach enhances psychological care. Respondents further explained ways in which the programme enriches practice. Among the responses stated was the fact that all disciplines of care have their own strengths and limitations and therefore a combination of disciplines complement each other thus providing a more comprehensive care to their clients. Similarly 3 (18.8%) participants explained that inter-disciplinary counselling improves the quality of service through applying a more and holistic approach to care, hence addresses needs of clients from diverse backgrounds. There were (6.3%) who showed that an inter-disciplinary approach provides opportunities for interaction and collaboration with professionals from other disciplines hence makes one more knowledgeable. Collaboration with related disciplines eventually translates to personal development, enriched practice and better therapeutic results.

### **3.4 Lecturer's satisfaction with the extent of networking and sharing of best practice with other institutions.**

Findings from lecturers' satisfaction with the extent of networking and sharing of best practice with other institutions recorded majority (43.8%) as being fairly satisfied, (37.5%) satisfied and only (18.8%) stating highly satisfied with the level of networking and interaction with related institutions.

### **3.5 Professional disciplines of the collaborating Institutions**

The researcher analysed the professional disciplines of the collaborating institutions as per the levels. Practicum (29%) was key in the undergraduate professional disciplines programme. This was attributed to the fact that effective counselling practice requires skills and techniques which are largely acquired during practicum sessions. The Masters professional disciplines of the collaborating institutions were analysed.

Community based organizations and education (30%) were rated highly as professional disciplines of the collaborating institutions at the masters level. The results are almost similar to findings at both the diploma and under-graduate level but slightly different in types of the programmes offered. Whereas practicum was rated highly at the first two levels, masters level recorded workshops as more useful among interdisciplinary programmes. Results showed that education (30%) is rated as the highest professional disciplines for collaboration mainly by teaching staff with PhDs. The argument provided alludes to the fact that at this level one is required to engage in educational research to generate knowledge required at different levels of training.

A further analysis of the description of the programme revealed that both scheduled lecture and practicum (28.6%) were the most preferred modes of collaboration. The study provided an analysis of description of programmes for counsellors. Medicine, psychiatry and nutrition (30%) were recorded by counsellors as the key programmes with whom they interacted. Counsellors' responses could be based on the fact that this study was carried out at Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital department of psychological counselling whereby it was necessary and also convenient to work closely with the cited programmes to enhance psychological counselling outcomes.

### **3.6 Relationship between the inter-disciplinary training programme and student performance**

The study was interested in finding out whether there was a relationship between the inter-disciplinary training programme and student performance. To ascertain this, the following null hypothesis was forwarded: There is no significance relationship between the inter-disciplinary training programme and student performance. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the inter-disciplinary training programme and student performance. The computation established a negative correlation between the two variables,  $r = -.225$ ,  $n=116$ ,  $p >0.05$ . Therefore the null hypothesis was retained. It was then concluded that the inter-disciplinary training programme does not influence the performance of students in counselling programmes. However a further analysis of programme revealed that interdisciplinary programme enhance psychological care as a result of interacting with professionals from different but related disciplines.

### **3.7 Barriers to inter-disciplinary training programme**

This research question was posed as follows: What barriers are encountered in the implementation of the inter-disciplinary training programme for counsellors caring for persons with emotional and psychological needs? To answer this question, trainers and counsellors were asked to state the barriers encountered.

Responses from open ended questions and interviews were coded and categorised for emerging patterns. The following themes featured prominently as the key barriers namely: discipline related and workplace barriers. Responses on discipline related barriers were cited as the major hindrance to interdisciplinary training. These included: institutions competing against each, professionals feeling differently and viewing their counterparts from other disciplines with

suspicion. As a matter of fact this was the most prominent theme amongst the barriers. Work-related constraints were cited by participants as lack of uniformity in curriculum for training counsellors, unclear policy guidelines, and lack of instructional and human resource among others.

#### **4. Discussion**

The main objective of this study sought to establish the extent of implementation of interdisciplinary programmes in the sampled institutions. Findings indicated that lecturers and counsellors were well aware of the inter-disciplinary training and counselling programmes in their respective institutions. The study concludes that most inter-disciplinary programmes were offered in form of practicum, scheduled lectures and workshops and were carried out within a period of between one day to three weeks. Response analysis on interdisciplinary programmes available in the sampled institutions revealed that collaboration of different programmes took place but only in the form of continuous quality improvement, research studies and development of counselling skills. Community based organizations, social work, medicine and education were cited as the programmes where different professionals collaborated on interdisciplinary programmes. Study findings also revealed that there was very little difference in programmes carried out at different levels of training namely: diploma, undergraduate and masters level. A further analysis of the programmes recorded a lack of policies and structures to effectively implement the process. Even though institutions demonstrated some level of awareness of such programmes it was very clear from the findings that there was no commitment by various stakeholders to promote and strengthen interdisciplinary training in the sampled institutions. Additionally the institutions lacked organizational and systematic realignment to prioritize collaborative practise in appropriate settings and psychological care situations. Overall, the

findings revealed that the form of interdisciplinary interaction in the training and counselling institutions lacked the pre-requests for running an inter-disciplinary programme that could bring about a meaningful change in the lives of learners and counselling practice. Jacobs (1989) recommend that for training to be effective, it must be focused on developing teaching processes which develop inter-disciplinary competencies for current and future psychological health professionals to work in collaborative practices.

The Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient test on the relationship between the inter-disciplinary training programme and student performance revealed that there was a non-significant relationship ( $r = -.225$ ,  $n=116$ ,  $p >0.05$ ) at alpha of 0.05 level of significance, confirming that interdisciplinary training had no significant influence on the performance of students in counselling training institutions. Results from open-ended questionnaires and interviews revealed that there was no relationship between the inter-disciplinary training programme and the performance of students in counselling programmes. These findings could be based on arguments that training institutions lacked teaching processes required to develop collaborative competencies necessary for various disciplines to work together. Furthermore, barriers highlighted in the discussions related to interdisciplinary rivalries were believed to be a major setback in the implementation and success of this programme.

However a further analysis of programme provided a completely different scenario from the findings above. The study revealed that interdisciplinary training and practice enrich and enhance psychological care, as a result of interacting with professionals from different but related disciplines. These findings are supported by reviewed literature which reveals that because almost all disciplines of care have their own limitations, inter-disciplinary counselling is believed to enhance the quality of practice through promoting a holistic counselling approach.

The results corroborate findings of previous studies showing that due to the increasing complexity of counselling care, there is need for counsellor training institutions to structure their curriculum in such a way that learners are trained not only to demonstrate accurate and current knowledge, but also have expertise to create effective strategies and approaches to address the challenges facing humanity today (Brams and Johnson 1997).

This study recommends that though the relationship between interdisciplinary training and student performance was not significant, there is need for various stakeholders in higher education to sensitize educators to incorporate this strategy in training counsellors.

This study dedicated much attention on establishing the barriers encountered in during implementation of the interdisciplinary training programme for counsellors. This purpose was achieved through administering a questionnaire with open-ended question and oral interviews with trainers and counsellors involved in the programme. Findings showed that lecturers experienced discipline related and workplace related factors.

The major challenge cited in the category of discipline related barriers was fear of competition from different training institutions and professionals within those institutions. Some professionals felt highly territorial about their subjects and felt threatened as new views of their subjects are promoted. They also felt that their disciplines were superior to others and therefore working together was a way of watering them down since they perceived the training offered was adequate and the best for their learners. The results revealed that this was mainly the case between disciplines within the hard sciences and social sciences. A number of converging trends have led to a growing acceptance of inter-disciplinary education due to the fact that issues facing humanity today are changing rapidly and in some ways are more complex than in the past. Despite this awareness previous studies have revealed that most teachers feel their education and

training is entrenched in specific disciplines so they are sometimes threatened when another discipline offers a differing viewpoint from their own (feeling territorial). As a result, most individual faculties may not be willing to provide the resources and funding to develop teaching programmes for inter-disciplinary education. This argument is mostly prevalent between social sciences and hard sciences such as medicine, law and engineering (Minore and Boon, 2002, Jacobs, 1989). In light of the foregoing views it can rightly be argued that disciplines can no longer afford to grow in isolation, especially for the society that has many challenging and emerging issues which require urgent interventions. Faculty development must be provided to address motivation to participate in interdisciplinary practice. This includes opportunity for faculty to learn how to facilitate interdisciplinary education sessions, learning and interdisciplinary skills. Agreeing with these findings, Hill (1998) formulates that health professionals come to the healthcare team with preconceived maps of their roles based on their learned culture, beliefs and cognitive approaches in their specific disciplines. They have poor understanding of the other person's roles or maps, which causes anxiety, conflict and ineffectiveness as a team. . Due to complexities of current psychological health care, there is need for specialized healthcare professionals to collaborate with members from many professions to address those issues by working together and communicating closely to optimize psychological care. This study concludes that unless effort is made to sensitize stakeholders on the benefits of interdisciplinary teaching, the approach will remain a foreign concept in our learning institutions

The study also established work place related barriers to interdisciplinary training and counselling practice. Due to competing interests, the trainers and counsellors lacked sufficient time to pay attention to integrating interdisciplinary approach in their programmes. Secondly,

there was also lack of clear policies. These policies have much to do with complying with the institutional guidelines as opposed to venturing into new concepts and ideas. They also faced challenges related to uniformity in curriculum which made it difficult to identify and harmonise themes for interdisciplinary training programmes. Finally, workload, lack of structures, finances and lack of understanding of psychosocial issues were established as workplace related barrier to inter-disciplinary practice. These findings corroborate similar challenges as highlighted in reviewed literature. Solutions should be sought by various stakeholders and find possible ways of addressing them in order to pave way for collaborative practices in training institutions.

## **5. Recommendations**

In order to strengthen the inter-disciplinary training programme for counsellors, the Commission for University Education and other stakeholders in Education should set a policy guideline on how to facilitate interdisciplinary education in a successful manner. Efforts should be focused on developing teaching processes to develop collaborative competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) necessary for current and future health professionals to work in collaborative practices. Furthermore there is an urgent need for faculty development in this area.

### **5.1 Recommendation for Further Research**

Currently there remains some doubt as to whether interdisciplinary education has a direct positive impact on the psychological health gain of service users and carers. Research is needed to evaluate outcomes (particularly client outcomes) of interdisciplinary models of education and practice. The research should link the effectiveness of educational processes for interdisciplinary education with successful outcomes of interdisciplinary education.

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