

## **Training of Peer Leaders: A Strategy to Enhance Provision of Psychosocial Support to Vulnerable Learners in Schools**

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The main aim of this paper was to investigate the factors affecting the effectiveness of peer leadership training offered to peer leaders to enhance the provision of psychosocial support to vulnerable learners in schools in Amathole West Education District, South Africa. The previous research in other countries have shown that many of these training programmes lacks institutional frameworks that makes it necessary for effective peer leadership training. This Training in peer leadership programmes in schools is noteworthy. A qualitative approach and a case study research design was used to investigate the effectiveness of the orientation training given to peer leaders in schools. Semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection tools. Four secondary schools were purposively selected. A sample size of 26 participants comprising of 4 LO teachers, 4 School Principals, 16 peer leaders, 1 District Official and 1 Learner Support Agent was used. Data was analysed using a thematic approach. The major findings revealed that the training programme for peer leaders was flawed and inadequate to cover the psychosocial support curriculum. The study concluded that the current training for peer leaders was weak and did not produce competent peer leaders. The study recommended that peer leaders should continuously be given training in different aspects of psychosocial support provision throughout the year and LSAs and LO teachers should be offered separate training as coordinators of school programmes. Lastly, peer leadership training curriculum should be reviewed to match the ongoing social transformation in schools and the programme should be allocated with a functional budget.

**Keywords:** Learner Support Agent, Peer Support, Skills Enhancement, Principals, Psychosocial Support Curriculum

### **1. Introduction**

Schools across the globe have in recent years taken to the use of peer-led group programmes to assist in the provision of psychosocial support to vulnerable learners within school settings (Demetriades, 2017). To achieve this, there is need for peer leadership to undergo comprehensive and appropriate training programmes has been regarded as critical (Bower, 2020). Consequently, through the support of the

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education departments, schools have had their peer leaders trained and imparted with the necessary skills to provide psychosocial support to their vulnerable peers (Camp, Foxx & Flowers, 2019). Supporting this idea, Katz (2018) contends that there is need for an ongoing peer leadership training in schools. Therefore, this paper sought to investigate the effectiveness of the training being offered to peer leaders in secondary schools in the Amathole Education District, Eastern Cape, South Africa.

Vulnerable learners are described as those learners who have limited access to basic needs which includes sufficient and nutritious food, shelter, adequate clothing, a safe home, and community environment; free from abuse and exploitation, family care and support, good health care, and lastly, the ability to take full advantage of available education opportunities (Shi & Stevens, 2021). The DBE has adopted the Department of Social Development's (DSD) definition of a vulnerable child as a child whose survival, care, protection, or development may be compromised due to a particular condition, situation or circumstance that prevents the fulfilment of his or her rights (Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2020). The education system has been argued in recent years to be one of the most appropriate mediums through which psychosocial support can be provided to vulnerable children because of a number of its comparability advantages over other services (Ntshunshu & Taukeni, 2020) due to its accessibility, which enables it to reach at least over 12 million children daily (Mathebula & Runhare, 2021). However, the effectiveness of the training offered to peer leaders has come under spotlight some decades ago and still prevails as it is one of the major factors that determines the success or failure of peer-led groups in schools (Kirori & Dickinson, 2020).

Studies have suggested that the observed ineffectiveness of some of the peer-led group programmes in the provision of psychosocial support to vulnerable learners in schools are attributed to various factors among them being inadequate in training (Chinyama, Rembe, & Sibanda, 2020). Similarly, Goldstein (2020) in their study observed that in order for peer leadership training to be effective, there should be evidence of the necessary skills on trainers, thus, effective programme designing, and training methods are critical. In order to succeed as peer led groups, Jacobson-Lundeberg (2016) suggests that the training curriculum should include soft skills such as communication, listening, reflecting skills (which enable participants to explore issues), observation, planning, guidance and counselling, report writing, networking *and the ability to inspire a shared vision amongst peer leaders.*

Heidenreich and Breukers (2020) in their study the effectiveness of peer-to-peer approaches as inclusive participatory interventions towards sustainability, noted that training is a vital part of peer support programmes in schools, as without effective training, peer leaders will not be able to effectively implement the services envisaged for their programmes. On their part, Shafiaai, Kadirvelu & Pamidi (2020) observed that the impact of a peer leadership training programmes is indispensable in providing tools and techniques that peer leaders will use in their mentoring function. This study, therefore sought to investigate the effectiveness of the training programme being offered by the DoE to peer leaders to enable them to provide psychosocial support to vulnerable learners in schools.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Researchers have described the training programmes for peer leaders in most education systems as generally weak (Goldstein, 2020). Many of these training programmes have been regarded as lacking

institutional frameworks that makes it necessary for effective peer leadership training (Atieh & York, 2020). For instance, many of these training programmes have an ineffectual curriculum content, training methods and suffers from limited resources to support the training programme (Garcia-Melgar, East & Meyers, 2021). Challenges of limited financial resources have been given as reason why peer led groups' training programmes suffer (Kerner, Carlson, Eskin, Tseng, Ho, Zima, & Leader, 2021). In addition, the limited research in this area in the context of the education system in South Africa means that neither the nature of the impact of ineffective peer leader training nor the current status of the training system is fully understood (Hobson, Maxwell, Káplár-Kodácsy & Hotham, 2020). This is therefore, the focus of this study.

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

The main objective of this paper was to investigate the factors affecting the effectiveness of the peer leadership training offered to peer leaders to enhance the provision of psychosocial support to vulnerable learners in schools in Amathole West Education District, South Africa. The specific objective was to investigate the factors that affect the effectiveness of peer leadership training.

## **2. Literature Review**

This section briefly reviews literature related to the study on the factors affecting the effectiveness of peer leadership training in the provision of psychosocial support to vulnerable learners in schools.

### **2.1 Composition of Peer Leadership Trainers**

According to Tanga & Luggya (2020) it is recommended that any peer training programme be composed of both males and female facilitators to model equal participation and promote gender sensitivity. UNICEF argues that, once, this factor is considered, a training programme is bound to be effective. Ernst & Kneavel (2020) also observed that the training programme has to be conducted by experts in areas relevant to the focus of a particular peer education programme, such as professional counsellors with experience in substance abuse or gender-based violence. For instance, facilitators with extensive experience in peer education such as drama teachers, since theatre-based techniques play an important role in peer education (Taylor (2020). Expert trainers transmit knowledge and skills, answers questions or promises to obtain information later and clarifies misconceptions (Denchuk, 2020). The use of experts in peer leadership training programmes guarantees that participants receive in-depth information about peer education and advanced techniques and learning theories are used. They are encouraged to hold refresher workshops to pass on new and pertinent information and skills (Orte Socias, Sánchez-Prieto, Moreno & Pascual Barrio, 2021).

In their study Fallace, Aiese, Bianco, Bolognini, Costa, Esposito (2019) posited that the use of expert trainers, enables peer leaders to gain essential social skills or the ability to interact and communicate effectively with others at personal level as well as to be able to work cooperatively with peers in the wider school community. They further argue that this also gives peer leaders the ability to understand other thoughts and feelings and increase the ability to social problem solving which has an impact on interpersonal relationships.

## **2.2 Peer Leadership Training Programme Design**

Peer leadership training programs are a globally established way of helping and supporting peer leaders by teaching them social (skills Wolniak & Ballerini, 2020). These programs should be designed in a way that enables effective training that prepares peer leaders to help their peers in areas of both academic and social growth (Crisp, Rickwood, Martin & Byrom (2020). Peer leadership training programmes should be designed as a deliberate psychological education strategy targeted at among other aspects such as emotional, healthy moral, social and cognitive development in learners (Orson, McGovern & Larson, 2020).

## **2.3 Monitoring and Evaluation**

In order to be effective, peer leadership training programmes need not to be viewed as one-day events by the trainers Casdagli, Fredman, Huckle, Mahony Christie (2021). As argued by Portman, Levy, Maher & Fairclough (2021), training programmes of peer leaders are not a one-time event, instead, they should be ongoing as a way of supervising peer leaders to improve their ability to provide accurate information including confidently influencing their peers in a positive away. Monitoring and evaluation of the peer leadership training programmes is necessary in order to regularly collect and analyse information, which is then used to guide the training programme, for example, either to continue on its course or change direction (Zakarija-Grković, Cattaneo, Bettinelli, M. Pilato, Vassallo, Borg Buontempo, & Gupta, 2020). Effectiveness of peer leadership training programme evaluation entails the assessment and analysis of the design, implementation, and results of an on-going or completed project (Youde, 2020).

## **2.4 Financial Resources**

Grek (2020), in his study in Sweden posits that the mechanisms through which the education system funding is governed, directed, or monitored should be guided by the identified needs, arguing that it is critical to allocate adequate resources to areas where they are needed. In addition, Tang, Nguyen, Dibley, Nguyen & Alam (2020) in their study in Vietnam, highlight that level of funding for various educational activities is a matter that those in authority should prioritise by ensuring that resource allocations are informed by learner needs. Globally, most school programmes' funding comes from public budgets, and these always compete with other priorities from the government's perspectives, as a result, it is often common for low key programmes such as peer education to receive little recognition (Mitchell, Purcell, Forsyth, Barry, Hunter, Simpson & Moore, 2020). In most developing countries like South Africa, departments of education are often allocated limited resources with which to pursue their objectives and therefore, using these resources efficiently for all school programmes is key (Misch & Dunham, 2021; Misch & Dunham, 2021; Tirivangasi, Rapanyane & Mugambiwa, 2021).

## **2.5 Imparting of Skills**

In order to be effective, peer leadership training programmes should be designed and implemented in a way that equips peer leaders with the relevant skills for their role (Cruz & Diaz, 2020). For example, among others, the trainings should encourage self-awareness and their peers. Skills imparted to peer leaders ought to enable peer leaders to empower their peers in both favourable and difficult times (Pruitt & Jeffrey, 2020; Ziegler, Matthews, Mayberry, Owen-DeSchryver & Carter, 2020). Through encouraging

problem-solving skills amongst peer leaders, schools enable learners to develop peer-led intervention strategies to reduce for example, bullying and harassment as well as to improve learners' psychological well-being and level of social support in schools (Zambuto, Palladino, Nocentini & Menesini, 2020). The improvement of peer leaders' skills can be evidenced by, among other things, the improvements in school attendance and performance, emotional state, and interpersonal skills in peer support group participants (Bodner & Elmas, 2020).

In their study, Duby, Verwoerd, McClinton Appollis, Jonas, Maruping, Dietrich & Mathews (2021) found that after undergoing training, peer leaders increased self-confidence, sense of worth, sense of responsibility including the belief that they were contributing more to the school community by helping their peers. Other skills credited to the peer training programme included interpersonal communication skills, enhanced self-confidence, active listening skills, conflict resolution and teamwork (Lluch, Lluch, Arregui, Jiménez & Giner-Tarrida (2021). Other studies such as (Lawrence, Chargualaf, Parker & Nagel, 2020) also showed that through enhanced peer leadership skills, the peer led group programmes had the potential to improve the school climate.

A Comprehensive Evaluation of Peer Led Programs (Berdebes, 2018) conducted by surveying five hundred and ten Californian schools demonstrated that life skills (specifically personal development, communication, decision making/ problem solving and conflict resolution/violence prevention) in peer leaders and those they helped improved as a direct result of peer programs. It was also found that peer programs improved academic achievement, self-esteem, and connectedness to school. Whilst schools cannot readily solve problems for students, they can teach them skills so they can help themselves and their peers (Flennaugh, 2017).

## **2.6 Training**

On average, literature reveals that globally three-day training workshops were conducted by the coordinating teacher to train students to become peer leaders (Mason-Jones, Flisher & Mathews, 2013; Bond, 2015; Johnson, Sundaram, Alder, Miller & Ragavan, 2020; Paolini, 2020). In general, literature reveals that these workshops training progressed according to the training manual guidelines (i.e., warm up activities, getting to know you, cooperation, communication, emotions and feelings, relationships, friendship, rules, group dynamics, decision making, problem solving, self-awareness). Globally, training has helped peer leaders to develop communication and empathy skills (Johnson, Sundaram, Alder, Miller & Ragavan, 2020). They add that training improves peer leaders' self-confidence as well as their approach and talk to people. Their findings suggest that training did have some positive effect on participants' overall social skills. However, students in their study reported improvements on the overall effectiveness question, cooperation, communication, empathy, belonging to school, relationships at home, friendships, decision making, conflict resolution and confidence. Additionally, Paolini (2020) advocate that improved communication skills assist peer leaders to peacefully resolve conflicts thereby reducing the number of aggressive incidents at school.

However, a study steered by Bond (2015) in New Zealand schools, discovered that schools adopt different approaches to the training of peer educators. For instance, some schools conduct training programmes which run for several months of training in theory with screeds of reading and assessments. The training

also included 520 hours of practical experience providing peer support. Peer leaders' training programmes in New Zealand are in some instances provided through the Intentional Peer Support (IPS) programme (Vujcich, Thomas, Crawford & Ward, 2018). The IPS training focuses on the building of shared relationships which can lead to a multi-faceted recovery process for vulnerable learners. The IPS programme can be originally learned in a five-day course but can also be learned over a series of mini workshops lasting up to twelve weeks. At the same time, advanced workshops are available to train peer led group supervisors and their mentors (Shook & Keup, 2012). Consequently, peer leadership training does add worth to the way that peer support is practiced, bringing peer leaders to see their work in a deeper and more philosophical manner (Turnuklu, Kacmaz, Sunbul & Ergul, 2010; Zan & Donegan-Ritter, 2014).

New Zealand schools have been known to follow an initial training and peer leaders continue to meet with their trainers and field staff every week for the next six months to discuss challenges they may be experiencing in communicating the information to their peers (Vujcich, Thomas, Crawford & Ward, 2018; Karaca, Akkus & Sener, 2018). In support of the idea of continued peer leadership training Bodner & Elmas (2020) averes that it is essential not to assume that a single peer education training workshop can lead to peer leaders being confident with the issues they need to share with their peers. For that reason, these scholars posit that peer leaders would need follow-up trainings and ongoing support so that they can be assisted to explore issues in greater detail, for example, by identifying new ways to carry out their responsibilities and have questions answered where they have doubts (De Vreede, Warner & Pitter, 2014).

In South Africa, once peer leaders have been recruited and selected in schools, the focus and emphasis should now be placed on their training (Chinyama, 2012). However, peer leaders' training programmes are not immune to challenges particularly in these ever-changing education systems and school environments. As observed by Cowie & Sharp (Eds.) (2017), challenges that normally affect the effectiveness of peer leadership training programmes are generally attributed to time constraints, financing difficulties and a self-belief feeling that the internal training was sufficient. Zambuto, Palladino, Nocentini & Menesini (2020) found out that the most critical areas of training were attitudes, ethics, gender-sensitivity, non-judgmental and positive role modelling.

In addition, Chinyama (2012) and Tangwe (2016) agree that training of peer leaders should be structured in a way that fosters volunteers to adopt the practices and beliefs of the program. They further noted that adequate training should include instilling a sense of responsibility into the peer leaders to become role models in their own lives and for the participants. The initial training programmes are critical as they assist in the developing of a shared vision amongst peer leaders, in addition to the clarification of expectations and the scope of peer leadership roles in schools (Wolniak & Ballerininim, 2020).

Marcus, Ngcobo & Reji (2020) further argue that training programmes for peer leaders should not be a once-off thing, instead there should be processes that are based on continual communication and learning among peer leaders and their partners. Furthermore, for peer led groups training to be effective, organizers should allow training to be led by existing peer educators, but also monitored by training supervisors. This helps to develop the skills and confidence of existing peer leaders as well as new peer leaders (Frantz, 2015; de Menezes & Premnath, 2016). The curriculum for peer leadership training programme should cover key topics on communication, ethical conduct, and the legal framework among others. The major aim is to ensure that the training covers all the basics that all peer leaders would need to start the process



of building appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes critical in the provision of psychosocial support to vulnerable learners in schools (Verbeem, Harper, 2020).

Wolniak & Ballerini (2020) aver that initial training programmes for peer leaders should not only be designed in a manner that allows for the gaining of technical knowledge, instead it should also build on their skills and attitudes that are needed to become effective peer leaders. Effective peer leader training programmes ought to be conducted in a participatory way. Thus, Sewagegn & Diale (2019) suggests that participatory training involves the use of creative and active learning techniques whose effectiveness lies in the fact that it allows peer leaders to experiment for themselves. Similarly, Karagianni & Jude Montgomery (2018) suggest that peer leaders' training programmes should be structured using a prepared curriculum but should also be flexible enough to adapt to the school environment's changing needs. This is particularly important in that, studies by Cowie & Sharp (2017) and Starbuck & Bell (2017) have recognised that knowledge alone is not enough, but that peer leaders also need to receive training on practical issues such as effective communication, problem solving and conflict resolution. Additionally, Stratford, Halpin, Phillips, Skerritt, Beales, Cheng & Davidson (2017) further assert that ongoing peer leadership training provides peer leaders with an opportunity to acquire up-to-date information, on issues covered during the initial basic level training and additional training, for example, on the details of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), gender relations or substance abuse. They further argue that this gives the chance for peer education trainers a chance to get feedback and to review progress so that peer leaders and trainers can learn from practical experiences in schools.

Peer leadership training programmes should not be viewed as being just about providing technical information, but also supporting peer leaders to internalise the issues and address their own fears, prejudices and vulnerabilities; understanding what their participatory methods and active learning are about (Karlsson, Andersson & Johansson, 2014). Furthermore, Szteinberg, Repice, Hendrick, Meyerink & Frey (2020) also observed that these training programmes enable peer leaders to experience participatory methods themselves and motivate them to use these techniques in the provision of psychosocial support to vulnerable learners in schools including building their confidence in order to tackle difficult issues, for example, traditional gender roles (Starbuck & Bell, 2017). Above all, an effective peer leaders' training programme should check at the end whether peer leaders have gotten enough knowledge, skills and developed appropriate attitudes. Participants are to repeat sessions and be able to re-run the training should they show unsatisfactory understanding of peer leadership concepts on ad hoc and haphazard basis (Cowie & Sharp, 2017).

Another concern raised by teachers and school management is that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) which often assist in the training of peer leaders promote competition rather than cooperation and collaboration among psychosocial support providers in schools. Moreover, the training is neither satisfactory nor adequate (Mutenheri, 2014).

### **3. Research Methodology**

The study employed a qualitative research approach to gain the perspectives of participants on the effectiveness of the training being given to peer leaders by the DoE in South Africa. The study used an exploration research design. The population of the study was 52 from which a sample size of 36 comprising

4 School Principals, 10 LO teachers, 2 LSA and 20 peer leaders. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions in order to boost data quality and minimise the risk of bias. The questions included open-ended items to capture participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of peer leadership training. Data was analysed through thematic approach, whereby major ideas that emerged from participants' narratives were identified and grouped into themes. Ethical considerations were observed, whereby issues to do with informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality were observed.

#### **4. Research Findings**

Participants gave a general perception on ineffective peer training programme being offered by the DoE. Several factors were identified as inhibiting effectiveness of the peer led groups' training programme.

##### **4.1 Time Constraints**

All the participants concurred that the orientation training period for peer leaders was too short to cover the rather long training curriculum. Training was scheduled for only three days during the month of March each year. During the course of the year, the DoE is unable to conduct further trainings for those peer leaders who join after training has been undertaken. One PL commented:

The training period allocated to peer mentorship is too short. We only train for three days.

The same views were echoed by the LSA:

The issue of the limited training period for peer leaders has been a major concern for us for some years now. We have been raising this concern for some years now after realising that most of the peer leaders came out from the training camp with very little knowledge and virtually no meaningful practical skills.

LO4 also concurred:

To be honest, the training period for peer led groups need to be reviewed as it is too short.

The DO also acknowledged the fact:

Indeed, the training period for peer leaders is too short to an extent that the department must often conduct a marathon type of a training to complete the curriculum. There are several factors which cause this, such as the department's filled up work programme for the entire year and limited financial resources.

##### **4.2 Limited Funding**

Another major finding which had a bearing on the non-effectiveness of the peer led group training was the issue of limited funding. The study findings revealed that this programme had no allocated budget within the department and the little funding that is used to conduct annual training programmes was being sourced from other departmental projects. The DO confirmed:



The peer led group programme have not been allocated a budget by the schools ever since it was introduced in schools. As such, this programme often suffers from limited funding which, for example, results in shortened training courses and lack of workshops or follow-up field assessments.

The LSA also agreed:

The peer led group programme is truly lacking funding. Firstly, the training is only 5 for 3 days because the department cannot fund for more days. Furthermore, the department is unable to provide financial resources for follow-up training assessments.

These narratives by participants confirm that lack of funding is rendering the training of peer led groups' training ineffective thereby affecting the efficient provision of psychosocial support to vulnerable learners in schools by peer led groups.

#### **4.3 Training Staff Shortage**

During data collection, it also emerged that the department had not adequately trained personnel to conduct peer education training programmes. There was no designated individual to oversee the peer led group programmes in schools. This study finding was confirmed by the DO:

Our department does not have a designated peer leader trainer. We only rely on experienced individuals who do not possess professional qualifications.

#### **4.4 Absence of Follow-Up Workshops**

The study also revealed that the DoE did not conduct follow-up training assessments on the field; that is, in schools after the initial trainings. It was further revealed that the department was not able to conduct follow-up training workshops to address identified skills deficiency by LSAs on trained peer leaders. LSA2 stated:

Ideally, it is expected that the department conducts follow-up training workshops during the year to address some identified skills deficiencies on peer leaders and address other concerns, but this rarely happens.

The DO also agreed:

We are unable to conduct field training workshops for the peer leaders, largely due to time constraints and limited funding.

PL10 confirmed this finding:

I have been a peer leader for the past 2 years and I have never attended a single training workshop organized by the DoE at school after the one the department conducts in March each year.

SP1 also echoed the same sentiments:

Its true mam, the DoE does not conduct follow-up workshops in schools as is normally expected. Given the fact that their initial training produces inadequately skilled peer leaders... something the department knows, it is expected that follow up workshops are conducted to fix these problems.

Participants confirmed that there are no follow-up training workshops for peer leaders after the initial training conducted early in March each year. The absence of such follow-up workshops resulted in the entire training programme for peer leaders being considered as ineffective.

#### **4.5 Absence of Effective Monitoring and Evaluation Processes**

The study findings also revealed that there were no effective monitoring and evaluation processes of the peer leaders' training programmes. The absence of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in schools was, thus perceived as a sign of an ineffective peer leader group training system which ultimately affected the provision of psychosocial support to vulnerable learners in schools.

LO3 responded:

The training given to peer leaders cannot be regarded to be effective because the DoE does not come to schools to monitor and evaluate the works of peer leaders after they give them the initial training.

PL14 also stated:

Our work is only monitored and evaluated by our LO teachers and the LSA who themselves also need to be monitored and evaluated by the department of education.

SP7 complained:

The DoE rarely visit schools to monitor and evaluate the skills of peer leaders in the provision of psychosocial support to vulnerable learners in schools.

The lack of effective monitoring and evaluation systems was a confirmation of the perceptions expressed by participants that the training programmes for peer leaders were not effective. Consequently, this translated into peer led groups' poor techniques in the provision of psychosocial support to vulnerable learners in schools.

#### **4.6 Absence of Coordinators' Training Programme**

The study also revealed that the DoE was not providing training for LO teachers and LSAs as coordinators of the peer led groups in schools. It however, emerged that LSAs were trained together with peer leaders, instead of having their own training programme as supervisors and co-ordinators of the programme in schools. Participants perceived that the absence of such a separate training programme was indicative of a weak training programme for the peer led groups' programmes in schools.

## 5. Discussion

The present study showed that the DoE had a peer leaders' initial training programme in place at the beginning of the year during the month of March each year. This provided the opportunity for peer leaders to be trained. However, this 'once-off' annual training programme did not cater for those peer leaders who then join after the training had been conducted which then resulted in them just undertaking duties without the necessary training. Underpinning the importance of training to peer leaders, the International Federation of Red Cross Centre for Psychosocial Support (2009) states that training makes it possible to link theory and practice, and to ensure that peer leaders have attained the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out expected tasks. The late comers therefore joined the team without an idea of the type of psychosocial support acceptable and appropriate in each context. Training in peer-leader programmes is important as this is what differentiates their role from informal peer-to-peer interactions (Huang, 2021).

Another key finding was that the curriculum training covered various leadership skills which included peer leadership, communication skills, interpersonal skills, listening skills, counselling skills and life skills. However, some of the peer leaders indicated that they had not received this training, both in peer leadership and psychosocial support, thereby creating serious implications about the effectiveness of the programme. In his study, an examination of substance abuse prevention programmes and their impact on minors who are prone to substance abuse in South Africa, Ngcobo (2019) recommends that the training modules ought to represent a sustained professional development and support throughout the peer-leader experience, and this should include a leadership course, ongoing workshops including supervision. Bhadra (2015) had previously confirmed that continuous supervision of the peer led training programmes make it possible to promote the development of knowledge and competences. More so, Bhadra adds that continuous supervision of training provides a forum for those being supervised to raise concerns, seek help in understanding and dealing with the problems encountered in their work with children most effectively, and receive emotional support.

The study also revealed several interesting findings over the manner through which the training of peer led groups was being handled. One of the major findings of the study was the period given to the training of peer leaders. In 2011 Mason-Jones, Mathews & Flisher, agreed with this study that the DoE conducted only one training per year in March every year and the training period ranged from 2-3 days. Although this training period was short by participants, however, drawing examples from developed countries like America, where peer leadership programmes are prominent, the training period in this present study was sufficient. According to Mason-Jones, Flisher & Mathews (2013) the initial training period for peer led group programmes was three days, after which peer leaders would then meet weekly with the Training Coordinator who then leads continuing educational processes as well as assists in planning and coordination of all peer-led programmes in the school. In the present study, there were no such regular weekly follow up meetings designed for the continued learning, thereby weakening the entire training programme. Mason-Jones, Flisher & Mathews, (2013) in their study Peer education training for sexual health and well-being in public high schools in South Africa revealed the initial combined training programme between peer leaders and support agents as being important in that it helped in clarifying three important leadership aspects, namely, shared vision for the programme, leaders-follower roles, and an understanding of the organisational structure. The initial combined training programme has the potential

to unify a diverse group of peer leaders around a common interest in accomplishing common goals (Juvonen, Lessard, Rastogi, Schacter & Smith, 2019 Mason-Jones; Flisher & Mathews, 2013). Presenting a different perspective to the current empirical picture of peer-leader training techniques, Jarman, Treneman-Evans & Halliwell (2021) pinpoint that their participants enjoyed having more than one peer-leader as it provided a variety of backgrounds and experiences to draw from. They therefore recommend the approach as an emergent model of best practice for peer leadership training which represents a sustained professional development programme inclusive of initial training, ongoing support, and supervision by professional staff.

Another interesting finding from this study was that the school Coordinators of these peer led group programmes were not getting the necessary training to enable them to conduct their responsibilities effectively. For example, it was revealed that the LSA and LO teacher was receiving the initial training of 3 days together with the peer leaders, and not all the teachers received any training. These findings contrast with those of Tiven (2002) in Louissaint (2021) who found out in developed countries, for example, America, additional training was provided for programme coordinators such as the provision of additional 10-hours in which they consulted extensively to support the programme's success. These scholars suggested that the training programme for coordinators was important to enhance their programme management enhancement skills such as communication abilities for effective peer group development. Thus, Tiven, by 2002 had observed that peer leadership coordinators in America occasionally received separate training programmes that combined opportunities for them to learn about the content of the programme as well as skills development and programme implementation strategies. As early as year 1992 and year 2000, Baxter-Magolda and Hare and O'Neill respectively, had concluded that coordinators' training programmes were highly recommended as they provided intensive teamwork building experience, reinforce commitment, motivation and an understanding of key issues.

The study findings of this study also revealed that there were no effective monitoring and evaluation systems in place of the peer led programmes by the responsible stakeholders. Participants indicated that after the initial training programme, there was no urgency in following-up to schools to assess how well the training concepts had been understood by peer leaders, LO teachers and LSAs. Tiven (2002) had hinted that the implementation of peer leadership programme ought to have a framework that include a feedback process as this assists in facilitating peer leaders' skill development and a means to evaluate the extent to which peer leadership activities are successful in accomplishing programme goals. Ahorsu, Vidaña, Lipardo, Shah, González, Shende & Schoeb (2021) added that the evaluation process can include written forms and focus group discussions or other group discussions, scheduled at regular intervals. They argue that the aim of these evaluations should be to gather feedback from peer leaders about participation in the programme and from peer groups about the impact of participating in activities led by peer leaders. This study therefore learnt from literature that evaluation methods vary, but the most useful written evaluations are a combination of open-ended and multiple-choice questions.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study concluded that, whereas the DoE provided training for peer leaders and LSAs, the training was found to be ineffective because of the limited number of days the training is offered. Some peer leaders did not attend the training because they joined the peer led groups after the initial training had been

conducted in March each year. The study also concludes that the challenge is compounded by the fact that there were no follow-up training workshops to fill in that gap and evaluate the success of the implementation of peer led group programmes. Finally, the study settled that the effectiveness of the peer leadership training programme in schools was being affected by limited financial resources. In addition, due to limited funding, the training for peer leaders was unable to have a budget that could go beyond 3 days, and the DoE could not conduct separate leadership training programmes for LSAs and LO teachers including conducting follow-up training workshops in schools.

## 7. Recommendations

In light of the foregoing findings, discussions and conclusions, the study puts forward some recommendations. In order to ensure that the peer leadership training becomes effective, the DoE ought to have an allocated budget for the initial training programme and follow-up workshops which would be used for the programme monitoring and evaluation. Without adequate financial resources, effectiveness of training would remain a pipe dream. More so, there is need to give a separate training for the LSAs and LO teachers as coordinators of the peer led group programmes in schools.

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