Original Research

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Navigating Secondary School: What Cushioned Adolescents in an Education Intervention in Urban Kenya

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Abstract

This paper explains sustained effects and what worked for students in the Advancing Learning Outcomes and Transformational (ALOT Change III) program. Data comes from qualitative narratives from the baseline survey of the program collected by the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) between December 4, 2019, and January 31, 2020, using focus group discussions (FGDs) and dialogues. The analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework to make comparisons and contrasts. Results showed that students transferred skills such as self-confidence from primary to secondary schools, enabling the adolescents to speak up and engage. This showed an effective implementation uptake. The implication of the study points to the efficacy of community-based programs in impacting behavior of adolescents beyond primary school.

Recommended Citation

Introduction

Research evidence suggests that secondary education is important to young people, particularly girls, in the following five ways: first, secondary education reduces the incidences of HIV and AIDs among girls; secondly, it enables adolescent girls to stay longer in school and, therefore, makes them less likely to marry early; thirdly, it alleviates poverty among girls by offering an opportunity to continue with schooling, thereby increasing the likelihood they can get better-paying jobs with higher wages; fourthly, secondary education ensures that benefits also accrue to the whole society as girls and young people stay in school longer, thereby making them less likely to participate in youth violence and become victims of crime (Rihani, 2006).

Note: Authors notes

Moreover, girls' secondary education increases social benefits that accrue to their respective societies through increasing political and civic participation, reduced episodes of sexual harassment, and lower odds of young women being trafficked for labor and sex. Secondary education enables girls to make decisions that cushion them against HIV/AIDS by giving them the information to prevent the disease and change their way of thinking so that girls are more likely to adopt self-protective behavior (Rihani, 2006; World Bank, 2018). For these benefits to be realized, girls need to be able to adjust to secondary school. This is the reason why we purposed to follow the cohort of girls and boys to secondary school, to see if the skills that they had learned when they were exposed to the intervention in primary school would hold as they joined secondary school. During the baseline in 2019, we listened to the cohort of adolescent girls and boys as well as their parents to gain an understanding of what has worked and been sustained for both pupils and their parents as they enrolled in secondary school and the challenges the pupils faced in this new level of schooling. We also wanted to understand how the Advancing Learning Outcomes and Transformational Change (ALOT Change) program has assisted in adjusting to secondary school.

Challenges Faced As Students Make a Transition to Secondary School Level

The transition out of primary and/or elementary school can create simultaneous feelings of excitement and worry in young people (Moore et al., 2021). While on one hand, students have opportunities to make new friends and experience increased independence, on the other hand, transition causes the re-organization of adolescents' social context where they may need to get new friends in their new schools, which are often in new locations (de Vries et al., 2021).

Transition, Socio-Emotional Well-Being, and Academic Achievement

Recent studies have shown that school transition experiences have a negative impact on both student academic achievement and their socio-emotional well-being and that there is a correlation between student socio-emotional well-being and academic achievement (Yao et al., 2018; Nygaard & Ormiston, 2022). Although the negative impact on academic achievement is experienced across all subjects, studies indicate that mathematics and sciences tend to be the most affected, with students developing decreased interest and negative attitudes towards these subjects as they transition to secondary school (Kaur et al., 2022; Yao et al., 2018). These attitudes are associated with aspirations to study that consequently affect how they perform in those subjects (Widlund et al., 2018). For instance, a study by Süren and Kandemir (2020) also showed a positive and moderate relationship between mathematics anxiety and motivation toward mathematics. It also highlighted that anxiety was a higher predictor of achievement compared to motivation. In addition, students who experience psychosocial challenges in secondary school have been shown to be at greater risk of dropping out of school than their peers (Parviainen et al., 2020).

Transition and Adolescent Bullying Behavior

Extant literature indicates that violence in schools, including bullying, is rampant in secondary schools (Zych et al.; 2017, Jegede et al., 2022). Studies show that the main reason for this is that, as adolescents transition from primary school contexts, which they are familiar with, to new secondary school contexts, they often seek to re-establish their social positions by bullying their peers (de Vries et al., 2021, Pouwels et al., 2018). In addition, other studies show a close association between reading skills and bullying. A study by Turunen et al. (2021) found that poor reading skills predicted bullying perpetration during school transition. For instance, the study highlighted that poor reading skills in grade 7 predicted bullying perpetration in grade 9.

Transition, Socio-Economic Status, and Well-Being

Research evidence indicates that socioeconomic status has an impact on students' transition experiences. For instance, Moore et al. (2020) found that the mental well-being of students was significantly predicted by the socioeconomic status of their primary and secondary school and that transitioning to a secondary school with a higher socioeconomic status was associated with reduced well-being. Furthermore, children coming from

poor households, attending disadvantaged schools, and displaying social and emotional challenges are more likely to report transition concerns (Moore et al., 2021).

Sustainability of Education Interventions

Even though education interventions have embraced the concept of sustainability, numerous such studies emanate from the health sector (Clapham et al., 2020; Fleiszer et al., 2015; Braithwaite et al., 2017). Conceptually, sustainability is when practitioners and relevant stakeholders, whether as individuals or groups, "engage with intervention components and organizational systems to embed, adapt or discard interventions" (Moore et al., 2017; Lennox et al., 2018). Other scholars have looked at sustainability as an outcome in which case sustainability refers to a practice that is durable and being implemented long-term at a level of fidelity, with continued valued outcomes (Nadalin Penno et al., 2019; McIntosh et al., 2009).

Factors that have been put forward to promote sustainability include the effectiveness of the intervention, costs, and attributes (Scheirer, 2013; Piñeiro et al., 2020); attributes and activities of the practitioners and implementers (Scheirer, 2013, Nordstrum et al., 2017); the effort of the intervention champions and leaders of the organizations (Wade & Kallemeyn, 2020); climate and culture organizations; monitoring and evaluation of the intervention; staff turnover (Simpson and Flynn, 2007, Thomas et al., 2018); length of implementation; quality; integrity; contextual factors of that implementation (McIntosh et al., 2013; Chambers & Norton, 2016); and the financial climate and external political climate (Bodkin & Hakimi, 2020). It is against that background that this paper seeks to unearth what worked and was sustained as adolescent boys and girls enrolled in an after-school support program made a transition to secondary school and show some of the challenges that were encountered, as well as what tenets of the ALOT Change Program cushioned them against the difficult situation in which they found themselves as they entered secondary school.

The Education Intervention

The ALOT Change project is a community-based after-school support program implemented in Korogocho and Viwandani since 2013 in conjunction with Miss Koch Kenya (MKK) and the U-Tena Youth Organization. The program is motivated by the need to have an integrated approach to improve learning outcomes, psychosocial well-being, and behavior among adolescent girls and boys. ALOT Change Phase III is a follow-up study of the phase II cohort who transitioned to secondary school in 2019. In this Phase, APHRC, in liaison with Miss Koch and U-Tena, is testing the feasibility of implementing the ALOT Change model among older adolescents and also to establish the sustainability of the effects of the intervention as observed in phase II on the adolescents in secondary school.

Intervention Components

Mentorship in Soft Skills
This involves mentoring and imparting soft skills (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) to adolescent girls and boys to enable them to successfully overcome the challenges of growing up as they transition to adulthood. The mentorship is also supposed to equip the adolescents with sets of tools for them to maneuver the new secondary school environment, which comes with opportunities to make new friends, work in teams, overcome peer pressure, and circumvent ills such as bullying.

Exposure Visits And Motivational Talks
These intervention components provide practical opportunities for adolescent girls and boys to think about their future careers and pathways to those careers. Exposure visits expose adolescents to work environments and institutions of higher learning. In addition, professionals in various sectors interact and share experiences about their professions. In this way, adolescents are encouraged to push themselves out of their comfort zone

and raise their personal goals and aspirations. These components are important for the secondary school sector since it is at the secondary school level (Form Two) that students begin to select subjects that they feel will be more relevant to future aspirations and careers. Four motivational talks and one exposure visit are planned annually.

Guidance and Counseling of Parents

This intervention component sensitizes parents and guardians of adolescent girls and boys enrolled in the project on how best to be involved in the children's lives and education. Parents join support groups, which are facilitated by a counselor, where they share experiences and support each other in parenting. To achieve this, 10 parental counseling sessions are held annually.

Holiday Homework Support

Here, the peer-to-peer support approach is used to provide a platform for adolescents to share knowledge on the subjects offered in secondary school. The peers subsequently work together to complete their homework. The importance of peer-to-peer support lies in the ability of students from various schools and with varied capabilities to support each other. The group discussions are facilitated by a mentor who assists the students to identify and prioritize topics for discussion. The key difference between the holiday homework support and extra tuition, which the Ministry of Education has outlawed in Kenya, is that there is no teaching involved in the holiday homework support. A total of 12 sessions are scheduled annually.

Digital Literacy

In partnership with local computer colleges, students are trained on the effective and safe use of digital content and devices. This training is expected to offer students the requisite knowledge, skills, and behavior to effectively and safely interact with digital content and devices. Moreover, digital literacy will enable students to use technology and assess the nature of the information acquired to support and enhance their learning environment (Ozdamar-Keskin et al., 2015). In essence, digital literacy has been recognized as one of the key competencies of a competency-based curriculum (CBC) in Kenya (KICD, 2017). As it is a short course, students will be enrolled for the component in the last year of the project, which should be sometime during this year.

Service Learning

The service-learning activities provide a platform for adolescents to put what they have learned into practice. With supervision from their mentors, the adolescents are engaged in the entire process of identifying a problem that they want to solve, designing the solution(s), mobilizing partners, sensitizing community members, undertaking the identified service-learning activity, and documenting the lessons learned. This way, they not only own the process but also feel accountable and responsible for providing solutions. In addition, we expect that this will promote social responsibility and citizenship skills. One service-learning activity is undertaken annually.

Methods

Data Collection

The qualitative data comes from a qualitative subsample of the baseline evaluation of the ALOT Change Program, collected by APHRC between December 4, 2019, and January 31, 2020. During the baseline evaluation, information was sought from adolescent girls and boys, their parents, community leaders, mentors, and counselors who were involved in the program's implementation from 2016 onwards. A total of 110 respondents including adolescent students, parents, mentors, counselors, and community leaders were interviewed through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and dialogues. (See Table 1). The sample of pupils included both boys and girls aged between 12 to 19 years, who had been in the program from the time

they were in grade six. At the time we collected baseline data, these adolescents were at the end of Form One. This paper uses data that comes from interviews, particularly dialogues with adolescent girls and boys in secondary schools, and focus group discussions (FGDs) with their parents. The adolescent girls and boys and their parents were recruited from the list of beneficiaries who had been in the program since 2016. For instance, we interviewed a parent-child nexus that consisted of "Mothers of Girls," "Mothers of Boys," "Fathers of Girls," and "Fathers of Boys." We employed purposeful sampling, which allowed us to incorporate into the study those participants who provided information-rich cases that merited an in-depth study and emphasized a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). Data was collected using semi-structured interview guides and focus group discussion protocols.

The parents' focus group discussion guide was used to elicit parental perceptions around the benefits, impact, and sustainability of the program as the children came out of primary school. Moreover, it illuminated the challenges that affected the education of girls and boys in secondary school. Eight focus group discussions (FGDs), four in each site of Korogocho and Viwandani, were held with parents. The FGDs done in groups were categorized to capture information from fathers with girls in the program, fathers with boys in the program, mothers with girls in the program, and mothers with boys in the program. The pupils' dialogue interview guide was used to understand the pupils' role and that of the community in their education. The tool also highlighted the education challenges that afflicted pupils who resided in the two urban informal settlements. Finally, from the dialogue interview guide, the researchers probed the pupils' understanding of the impact of the intervention in the community and on their secondary education. This paper highlights the data from the pupil dialogues and parents' FGDs to share narratives from their perceptions about what worked for them from the ALOT Change intervention to cushion them from the challenges of entering a new phase of schooling in secondary school.

Table 1: *Distribution of Qualitative Respondents*

Study Population	Korogocho (*n* = 56)	Viwandani (*n* = 54)	Total (*N* = 110)
Focus group discussions (FGDs)			
Parents	34	32	66
Key informant interviews (KIIs)			
Community Advisory Committee member in charge of education	1	1	2
Mentors	3	3	6
Counsellors	2	2	4
Dialogues			
Adolescent boys and girls	16	16	32

Analysis

All the qualitative data for this paper comes from the qualitative component of the baseline evaluation of the ALOT Change program. The data was tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim into MS Word by a professional transcriber. The research team generated a coding scheme both inductively and deductively (Boyatzis, 1998; Crabtree & Miller, 1999) and fed it into NVivo software to make it easier to organize the data collected from the study participants at the baseline evaluation of the ALOT Change Program Phase III with the follow-up participants. The deductive codes were largely based on the research questions guiding the qualitative study, informed in some cases by previous studies. Inductive codes were largely informed by thematic areas that emerged during coding. The analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework that uses matrices to look deeply into the data and compare and contrast the perceptions of adolescents in secondary school with those of their parents. Moreover, reviewing the interview transcripts allowed us to identify the inductive codes

that emerged from the data. We did this by identifying those phrases in the transcribed data related to the perception of the adolescents and parents on what has worked to sustain the intervention impacts beyond primary school and the challenges encountered in secondary school (Maxwell, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The first reading of the transcripts enabled us to gain an in-depth understanding of the responses that the pupils and their parents provided about what has worked for them and what they see as the sustained impacts of the intervention beyond primary school. The responses of girls and boys and their parents about their perspectives were compared, and the codes were then grouped into thematic areas. The narratives were grouped into a matrix format (Miles & Huberman, 1994) that enabled the researchers to identify the differences and similarities. The key thematic areas that emerged from the girls and boys and their parents included: the context of being in secondary school; development of talents; resistance to peer pressure; maximizing the use of time; violence; aggressiveness, bullying, and loss of concentration; stress due to the many subjects offered. Regarding how the program has helped to solve the problems, some of the thematic areas included supporting siblings with homework, management of time, confidence to speak up, and a good choice of friends.

Results

The A LOT-Change cohort had been in the program since 2016, and joined Form O

ne in 2019, carrying with them the skills acquired during the time they spent within the program in the respective primary schools. Moreover, quite a number of these pupils had been supported through the subsidy program provided, by the ALOT Change program (Abuya et al., 2019b). The narratives of the pupils and the parents show that the following worked well for both pupils and their parents: coping with the general situation in secondary school, developing talents, improving on them, and having the ability to resist peer pressure and thereby maximize the use of time. While the most common challenges that affected the secondary school-going students and their parents included violence, being aggressive and being bullied, loss of concentration in school, and stress emanating from the workload in secondary school. Ways in which ALOT Change assisted in adjusting to secondary school included supporting fellow students and siblings with homework, proper management of time, greater confidence to speak up, and choice of friends. It should be noted that in what worked and how the program enabled the pupils to sidestep the challenges in secondary school lie some of the key elements that were sustained.

What Worked Well for Students and Parents By Pupils Enrolling in Secondary School?

Positive New School Environment

The ALOT Change pupils who joined secondary schools were enthusiastic about being within these schools. Having made a transition to secondary school, the pupils found it exciting, as they had encountered a new school environment that was supposed to add to the knowledge they had acquired in primary school. For some of the students, being in secondary school presented an opportunity for them to experience a different environment in a school that was away from their homes and the usual home environments within the urban informal settlements. One girl attending the dialogues in Korogocho said:

> Personally what I loved about joining the school was the environment. Let me say I came from the ghetto and went to another environment…. I was used to noise… whenever you passed by the roadside [referring to the environment where she was from] before people were used to talking and now went to a quiet environment [Emphasis added] where everyone is on their books. (Female Pupil Dialogues, Korogocho, 06122019)

Enhanced Social Awareness

Another aspect that contributed to a positive transition was the sense of community at the secondary school level. This was particularly evident among the adolescents who joined the boarding schools, away from home. The sense of community seemed to have come out of being away from home and thereby relying on peers for support. This is what the female pupil attending a dialogue in Korogocho said (R7): "What I liked in secondary is the act of helping each other out where people are together… unlike in primary when one used to say you have to deal with your situation…(Female Pupils Dialogue, Korogocho, 06122019)."

Developing Pupils Talents

One of the significant features of secondary education that also stood out for the adolescents was that the secondary school level offered many opportunities to improve talent. This was due to the presence of clubs, like music and drama. The presence of these clubs enabled adolescent girls and boys to sharpen their skills and talents in music and theatre. In their view, this was an added advantage over what they were exposed to in primary schools. Adolescent boys attending the pupil dialogues in Korogocho said:

> R6: I like secondary school, because of my talents like music and drama. When I was in primary, I was not participating in music, but when I went to secondary school, I started participating in music. I feel it is helping me because I can cope with my feelings and I can share with my music teacher because I trust him. (Dialogues, Male Pupils, Koch, 06122019)

In addition, to getting involved in music and drama, the young adolescents got an opportunity to participate in science classes, clubs, and games. Participating in the science lessons enabled the pupils to perform science experiments, hence reconciling some of the ideas they saw online and what they did in the classrooms. Moreover, participating in games enabled adolescents to exercise and avoid being idle. An adolescent boy attending pupil dialogues explained this experience in this way:

> What I found good in secondary school is how you can perform experiments. I liked watching science shows on TV…. So, I got that opportunity to sit with teachers who are qualified in that field, and they shared with me their personal experiences…. Another thing I liked about secondary school is rugby. It helped me because I wasn't fit…. Rugby gave me that chance to show my skills…. (Dialogues, Male Pupils, Koch, 06122019)

According to the adolescent pupils, the presence of debating clubs, also helped them to sharpen their public speaking skills, thereby being better public speakers. A male adolescent attending dialogues in Viwandani explained his experience:

> There we have preps (meaning time to read in the evenings), and we have been able to see… to experience new things. We have clubs for example there is a debating club; it helps you in your confidence, it helps you in your speech, and you can be able to express yourself to other people fluently [Emphasis added]…. (Dialogues, Male Pupils, Viwandani, 04122019)

It must also be noted that the development of talents, whether in class during science or outside the classroom during games, further inculcated in the young people the competitive spirit. It dawned on the pupils that there was still a lot of room to improve their various skills. A male adolescent attending a dialogue in Korogocho explained:

> R2: What I like about secondary… the games because there are many games. Nobody can be left out because you can involve yourself in other games. Also in secondary school, you get more competition so you know where you are, and you can improve your academics. You put in more work and decide what you want to surpass the other people, like getting to number 50. (Dialogues, Male Pupils, Koch, 06122019)

Maximize the Use of Time

Both adolescents and their parents were in consensus that what worked for young girls and boys in secondary school was the opportunity to organize themselves and keep the focus on learning. This was achieved through waking up early and starting their day early. This ensured that the adolescents got into the habit of being organized. This brought about satisfaction and contentment among adolescents about life in secondary school. A female adolescent attending dialogues in Korogocho explained:

> M: Okay. R3 what did you like about secondary school?

> R3: What I love about secondary is that there are increased subjects…. They are many but it also gives you the drive to work hard…. You also find that there is waking up early to go to class to study and that impressed me…. (Dialogues, Female, Pupils, Koch, 06122019).

Moreover, the adolescent girls and boys felt that they had enough time to dedicate to their studies, compared to what they were able to do while in primary school. For example, they intimated that in secondary school, they were able to use the prep time to complete their homework and revise. A female student attending dialogues in Korogocho explained this experience:

> R5: what I loved about there (referring to secondary school) is that you have enough time to study unlike in primary…. When you come from school, you find that you have a lot to do and you don't get the time to read your books…. In secondary, you find that you have enough prep time to read everything and understand whatever you were taught. (Dialogues, Female Pupils, Koch, 06122019)

Mothers with daughters in the program saw the maximization of time to be an outcome of efficient planning among young people, thereby creating enough time for their studies. The young adolescents were able to plan their time on their own, without necessarily waiting on their parents. One mother with girls in the program said, "I can say, that my daughters since they joined the program with U-Tena… even in the house without planning work for them, they plan themselves and do it. Once they finish they go to study. So the program is good" (FGD, Mothers of Girls in the Program, Viwa, 17122020.

Challenges Faced by ALOT Change Students and Parents in Secondary School Education

Aggressiveness and Bullying

One of the challenges that seemed to have affected the young adolescents who joined secondary school was aggression and bullying of the Form One students by older students. The boys from both Viwandani and Korogocho experienced violence, aggression, and bullying. This started with the young Form One students being called names such as "*monos*" (referring to them being the newest entrants into secondary school) in the particular school. This is how the boys attending dialogues in Viwandani explained this phenomenon, "yeah for me, just like from what R3 (referring to another respondent) has said, life in high school is very challenging. At times we Form Ones, and we face a hard time in school; our peers just "monopolizing" (referring to bullying), us calling us funny names but we just cope with it…. (Dialogues, Male Students, Viwandani, 04122019*).*

Bullying was perpetrated by those students whose performance was below average in school. Bullying was also perpetrated by those who were in the senior classes, like the Form Fours who saw the incoming Form Ones as an easy target. A male student who was part of a dialogue in Viwandani intimated:

> R1. When I entered the school after about one week, the Forms Ones were complaining that they were bullied by the Form Fours…. [Those] doing well in their exams are the ones who don't bully the Form Ones…. (Dialogues, Male Students, Viwandani, 04122019)

Other forms of violence against the students were also netted out in the dormitories and the queues for food. In secondary schools, the dormitories are shared among Form One to Form Four students. In this kind of scenario, it is inevitable that the senior students become violent toward the younger students. This violence was also seen as students queued for food, atypical of the rush that students engage in as they run to queue for food in schools. Male students attending the dialogues in Koch extrapolated:

> R7. What changed for me is increased violence. In our school, violence is everywhere. In the lines for food to the dorm. You find that you argue with people about the simplest things. Like in our school even bread…. Even though… every class has been given bread, there must be a scramble…. Dialogues, Male Students, Korogocho, 06122019).

Loss of Concentration and Attention in Secondary Schools

One of the other challenges identified particularly by parents was the loss of concentration as the students entered secondary schools. This loss in concentration was noticeable among girls and was also mainly reported by fathers of girls, who reside in Korogocho. Parents explained the loss of concentration in three ways: those children who attend non-state schools are usually closer to their teachers when they are in primary school. This allows them to have maximum concentration and hence tend to perform well. Secondly, the parents felt that the reason why teachers in the non-state schools in the urban informal settlements tend to be closer to the students is because of being subjected to performance contracts that bind them to their work. On the contrary, parents felt that teachers in the public schools, up to 2018, were not subjected to the performance contracts and were not teaching effectively. This was not easy for those who had come out of the non-state schools where they were used to being supervised by teachers when in school. This is how the fathers of girls in the program said:

> R3: Since she joined, I see there are some changes because of concentration…. You know at times these informal schools, and these government schools, and the established private schools, there is a difference. These informal and private schools usually get very close to the child [Emphasis added] because of the contract they sign. They are normally given performance contracts, and if your class will not perform well in this subject, then I don't see the reason for you being here. But the government ones don't have that…. (FGD, Fathers of Girls in Koch, 20122019)

Stress Due to the Increased Number of Subjects, Grading System of Exams Offered in Secondary School

The increased number of subjects at the secondary school level was reported to result in stress among students. Students were in a dilemma on how to make their timetables and balance their time while ensuring that they cover all the subjects. A female student who attended dialogues in Viwandani had this to say:

> R. It was tiresome because in primary we are used to doing 5 subjects, then, we are told we have to do 11. You don't know how you will draw your timetable, you don't know how you will manage your timetable. Let's say you study English, then you are like eh! I will not do biology, yet tomorrow we have a biology lesson…. (Dialogues, Female Students, Viwandani, 04122019)

In addition to the high number of subjects in secondary school, students were also stressed because of the grading system. Those students who had been used to attaining position 1 or 2 found that they were now competing with other equally brilliant minds and so they could not get to the first positions in their respective classes. This is how the female students in Viwandani explained the stress:

> R5: It was the first exam, in primary school I used to be in positions, 1, 2, and 3. Then we went to high school, on the first exam you are in position 10 in class, in the stream you are in position 280 and you have an A- or an A. Then you are like, I have an A- then I am position 200. Then next exam you are in

position 180 and in class, you are in position 20. Then you start getting stressed…. (Dialogues, Female Students, Viwandani, 04122019)

Closely linked with the exam grading system was the onset of exams in the respective secondary schools even before the students could settle down in school. Those who entered secondary schools when exams were underway did not have time to settle, nor to prepare, which led to failure in exams and thereby heightened stress levels. This was still common with the female students who said, (R7): yes. I did not know which exam to study for, and I went to school late. So, the week that I went, I went like today and tomorrow is the exam. I didn't even know the subjects to do. I was so confused, and I failed the exams…. (Dialogues, Female Students, Viwandani, 04122019)

How the ALOT-Change Program Has Assisted in Adjusting to Secondary School

Supporting Fellow Students and Siblings With Homework

From the narrative of the parents, the ALOT Change program enabled the students to cope with life in secondary school. According to the parents, ALOT Change enabled the secondary school-going students to emulate the role of a "mentor" by helping their fellow school students as well as their siblings to complete their homework. Consequently, this improved the performance of other secondary students, whether it was their peers in school or their siblings in the household. A mother of a boy attending an FGD in Korogocho said:

> Secondary school is difficult. They are twins…. They exchange and start revising. Where he has gotten wrong, if it is easy he tells him, you got this one wrong and it is so easy…. The other one checks too and corrects his sibling. I thought to myself if they started doing this, God has intervened and U-Tena has helped them get somewhere. (FGD, Mothers of Boys in Korogocho, 16122019)

Reinforced Students Management of Time

Many of the secondary school students intimated that the ALOT Change program assisted them in the management of their time. Management of time can be traced back to when these pupils were taught how to prepare a timetable or schedule of activities when they were in primary school during ALOT Change Phase 2. This made them more responsible, accountable, and better planners and time managers. A female student attending a dialogue in Viwandani explained:

> R1: It helped because when we were in the ALOT change program, in life skills we studied about managing your time. So, in high school, you find that there are many subjects and the prep time is only 2-3 hours, so it forces you to manage your time. You know how you will plan your timetable for the time that you have…. (Dialogues, Female Students, Viwandani, 04122019)

Reinforced Confidence to Speak Up in Secondary School

One of the key persisting positive changes that has been consistently observed in pupils who attended the ALOT Change program was the ability to express themselves better and to speak up due to enhanced self-confidence. Enhanced self-confidence among the pupils in the study was due to mentoring in life skills. Self-confidence among pupils in secondary school enabled the students to speak up for themselves and others in the school. This narrative on self-confidence was mainly articulated by students from Viwandani, particularly female students. We should note that Viwandani is where the leadership component was implemented during Phase II of ALOT Change. This is what the female student said:

> R2: In ALOT Change, I was a leader when I was in our primary school [Emphasis added]. So, for me, I used to know how leaders behave. So, it was easier for me to use the tactics that are in leadership skills, for me to be able to convince this girl that she should not be too hard on people (referring to

fellow students) because one day she might also be in a situation where she is not a leader, who will help her? (Dialogues, Female Students, Viwandani, 04122019)

Moreover, self-confidence in secondary school reinforced the ability of girls to speak in front of the school fraternity. A female student in Viwandani summarizes this when she says, "It was in a parade and the principal told me to give a vote of thanks to a visitor who had come in our school and I spoke well… (Dialogues, Female Students, Viwandani, 04122019). Another female student reinforced the virtue of self-confidence when speaking to their peers and the general population when she affirmed "in the leadership skills we were taught that you have to be confident, you don't have to shy away from people, they can't eat you, they are just people, you have to speak to them with confidence (Dialogues, Female Students, Viwandani, 04122019).

In addition to speaking in front of the school, because of self-confidence, they were able to raise issues related to some of the ills in the school. For example, the students were able to raise the issue of bullying within the school, and bring it to the attention of the school leadership. This enabled action to be taken against the senior class (Form Four) who were the perpetrators of bullying. A male student in Viwandani extrapolated:

> R2: For me due to the excessive bullying, I decided to raise an issue during our annual class meetings, so because I had learned about leadership skills and I am a class representative [Emphasis added], I applied leadership skills and critical thinking to solve the issue. So we noted down the issue passed it to the class teacher, and announced it to the assembly. Thereafter the principal acted upon the Form Fours. They were suspended for one week…. (Dialogues, Male Students in Viwandani, 04122019)

To exhibit the key tenets of self-confidence, it was important for the pupils to believe in themselves and their capabilities. This was particularly important for the young adolescents who had joined secondary school recently and who needed to function in their new context. This included believing in what they did, and asking questions when they were in doubt. A male student attending dialogues in Viwandani explained it in this way:

> R6: What helped me is that I was believing in myself. Yes, I'm in a new environment, yet, I don't know anything that goes on but as we kept on being told you just keep pushing on, as long as you know where you come from, you know what you want, where you are heading to…. (Dialogues, Male Students, Viwandani, 04122019)

Good Choice of Friends
From the narratives of the secondary school students, it was also clear that having participated in the ALOT-Change program enabled them to be able to choose good friends. The choice of good friends seems to have been one step in the right direction in mitigating the pressure to conform to peer pressure. In addition, a good choice of friends encouraged young adolescents to appreciate their differences among themselves. A male student attending a dialogue in Viwandani had this to say, "in the ALOT Change program, we were told how to choose our friends. You should not expect that everybody is exactly like you. You should appreciate your friends' differences." (Dialogue, male students, Viwandani, 04122019).

Moreover, some parents also agreed with the students that ALOT Change has enabled the students to know how to choose friends and avoid peer pressure. Mothers of girls in an FGD were in a consensus that, "when they get friends, the friends tend to misguide them. But because this child has gone through this training, she separates herself from the others and she comes and tells me, mum. That so and so was telling me this and that, and I tell her to leave them alone and to try to do her things because if she tries following them she will be lost and she listens to me" FGD, Mothers with Girls in the Program, 19122019).

Ability to Resist Peer Pressure

Moreover, coming out of primary school the young adolescents, were able to continue to resist peer pressure in secondary school, hence showing that this particular attribute was sustained. Therefore, the students were able to utilize the knowledge acquired in life skills during ALOT Change II to help them avoid joining groups with negative influence. A male pupil from Viwandani explained:

> Not to forget some of the things which we were being taught… from 2016 to 2018 in the ALOT Change program by U-Tena. We were told that we should not allow ourselves to be pushed around by other people and that we should not follow bad behavior. So, I have been able to see it and whatever we have been taught I have applied it. I have been able to efficiently choose my friends…the ones with the same targets, the same goals…moving in the same direction, and… put a boundary on the friends whom I know will have a bad influence on me…. (Dialogues, Male Pupils, Viwandani, 04122019)

The parents also reemphasized the notion that these young people had been able to use the lessons learned from the ALOT Change program to resist peer pressure. According to the parents, the skills taught in the program have shielded their daughters from being influenced by other girls into leaving home and not attending school. The ability of adolescents to sidestep the influence of peers enabled them to transition into secondary school with ease. A mother of a girl in the program from Korogocho intimated:

> R2: My girl came home and told me "there is a form three girl who told me to say I am going to school but on the way, I should change to home clothes and I join them, where they are going" [Emphasis added]. When I asked her what she has decided, she told me…she wants to continue with school…. so as a parent I just talked to her and advised her…. (FGD, Mothers of Girls in the Program, Koch, 16122019)

Discussion

This paper had the goal of providing an in-depth understanding of the sustained effects on the students and parents who were part of the earlier cohort enrolled in the ALOT Change program. In addition, this paper also sought to illuminate some of the challenges that adolescent girls and boys experienced in secondary school and what elements of the ALOT Change program enabled them to outlive the challenges. This paper points out the emergence of a new tenet of the program beyond what had been earlier envisaged in the teaching of life skills. Ass the cohort of girls and boys transitioned to secondary school, theirtalents evolved and improved beyond what was taught in life-skills lessons. This was due to the presence of clubs, like music and drama. The presence of these clubs enabled adolescent girls and boys to sharpen their skills and talents in music and theatre, over and above what they were exposed to in primary schools.

Research evidence shows that for programs to be sustained, these factors must be present: length of implementation, which is not necessarily the only aspect, but also involves quality, integrity, and contextual factors of that implementation. We note that secondary school students were able to continue to resist peer pressure, that is, they were able to keep off those attributes that would negate their behavior emanating from their peers. In addition, secondary school pupils were able to continue to support their peers in homework (Abuya et al., 2019b). Accordingly, the ALOT Change program enabled students to emulate the role of a "mentor" to help their fellow secondary school students as well as their siblings to complete their homework (Abuya et al., 2021).

It should be noted that we also established that the students continued with time management, a skill that emanated from pupils being taught how to prepare a timetable or schedule of activities when they were in primary school during ALOT Change Phase II. Time management was therefore a follow-up and sustained initiative of what the pupils had been exposed to in primary school. Managing time made them more responsible, accountable, and better planners and time managers. This study shows that community-based

programs like the ALOT Change can enable behavior to be sustained, adding to the narrative that, even though evaluations that have focused on the sustainability of school-based positive behavior interventions are limited (McIntosh et al., 2013; Norton et al., 2017), sustainability can also be observed in community-based programs.

Further, self-confidence among pupils in secondary school enabled them to speak up for themselves and others in the school. Self-confidence has been one of the skills that have been sustained since the program's onset in 2013 (Abuya et al., 2019a). The length of time with which some of the skills, including self-confidence, have been sustained into secondary school points to the effectiveness of the intervention (Schell et al., 2013) implemented by practitioners and implementers who are well-versed with the context (Nordstrum et al., 2017), supported by the effort of the intervention champions and leaders of the implementing organizations. Overall, we posit that just like the school-based programs can be sustained, the community-based programs have the equal potential of being impactful on the behavior of adolescent girls and boys beyond primary school, as they transition into secondary school.

Acknowledgments

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