

## INFLUENCE OF PEER GROUP ON ADOLESCENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ILORIN METROPOLIS, KWARA STATE

BY

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### Abstract

*This study investigated the influence of peer group on adolescent's academic performance. Descriptive research design was used. Random sampling technique was adopted to select 200 in-school adolescents from five secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis of Kwara State. Questionnaire was developed to collect data. The data collected were analysed using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study revealed that peer group could either positively influenced the academic performance of in-school adolescents. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that parents and teachers should provide adequate guidance to adolescents to help them understand how the friends they keep can either positively or negatively influence their academic performance in school.*

**Keywords:** *Influence, Peer group, Academic performance*

### Introduction

Adolescents are categories of children that usually form groups in the schools. Truly speaking, adolescence is the most chaotic and stressful of all stages in human life (Brown, 2000). In addition, the complexities of contemporaries' life have made adolescence a major developmental period compared to the ritualized transition; it has been in traditional culture and past generation. Generally, it has been observed that a group which a child belongs to could influence his learning. Studies from various cultures have shown that a child right from infancy to adolescence is faced with urge to belong and to be accepted by the group. A basic human need is to acquire an affiliation to a group in the society. Peer relationships are common in the schools and homes and these play important roles in the socialization of children in Nigeria.

Students in the midst of their group transformed into the true picture of their behaviour, they feel more comfortable among fellow students but feel morose at home or at the presence of their teachers. The most important influence on students' behaviour to learning is not always the teacher but the fellow students. With this, there is need to identify the influence of peer group relationship on academic performance, although there are other factors that can influence the academic performance but the role played by the peer group in academic performance is more than other factors because the attitude of students to learning are not always encouraging. The most common types of peer group to be investigated are the secondary school children who fall into the same group that could have negative influence on their academic performance.

Bryman (2006) claimed that children throughout their school career will be grouped with their contemporaries so they will become accustomed to having the limitations and addition of each age group intensified. Buhs, Ladd and Herald (2006) wrote that the peer group outside the home from which does not always conform with adult standard, and each child strive to abide with the ethics of the group they takes membership with because rejection by the group may have negative effect on the learning of the child. Carver, Joyner and Udry (2003) feel that acceptance by a peer group improved social relation. These have beneficial effects on individual learning insecurity that arises from satisfying emotional tension enables him to concentrate more on his assigned learning tasks. This indicates that acceptance by the group may have positive effect on the child. A child who is not brilliant enough may do better if he is accepted by a group that is inclined to study. It has been observed that a child learns more easily within

his peer group. Where he is wrong, he prefers to be corrected by a member of his peer group than by the teacher.

In support of this view, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) advised that the school must therefore use peer group energies to promote rather than impede good learning. It is therefore necessary to let students realize the reason why they have to be careful in choosing their friends so that their attitudes toward learning would be improved as the peer group they belong can have effect on their learning negatively and positively. Peers are so critical to an adolescent's should provide boundaries from which teens form their identity, while peers form the cushion of support during the fragile time that identity is being formed. These boundaries that enables him to internalize the values that form his character to foster his learning that he acts accordingly without generating retribution from authority or rejection from his peers.

In ways similar to the community, the peer group becomes an agency of enculturation and learning. Even very young children develop a sense of self from their perceptions of important people in their surroundings, including relatives, teachers, and peers. Socio-economic status, ethnic identity, and parents' occupations affect how families view themselves and the process by which they socialize their children (Barbour, Barbour & Scully, 2002). Later, as children leave the home setting, their self-perception and socializing skills become influenced by how their peers view them. When children move out from family to child-care centers, school, and the community at large, they begin to form attachments, and friendships emerge through their play. These relationships influence behaviour. Even infants and toddlers are observed reacting to other infants by touching them, by crying when others cry, and later by offering nurturance or comfort. By about age three, early friendships begin to form and children's peers begin to have a more lasting influence (Brown, 2004).

Peer influence on behaviour gradually becomes more dominant. Caplan and Steinberg (2002) maintained that peer groups have an even stronger influence than that of parents, although that extreme position has been refuted by other researchers (Castejon, 2000). Gradually, children discover that others can share their feelings or attitudes or have quite different ones. The perspectives of others will affect how children feel about their own families. Children usually have a "family" view of their own and of other cultures. So, when confronted with other perspectives, they often need to rethink their own viewpoints. It is often difficult for children to adjust to the idea that other families can function radically differently from their own and yet hold many of the same attitudes and beliefs and be equally nurturing and secure. The peer group serves as a barometer for children examining themselves and their feelings about self and family. The peer group also influences development of children's socializing skills. These early friendships help children learn how to negotiate and relate to others, including their siblings and other family members. They learn from peers how to cooperate and socialize according to group norms and group-sanctioned modes of behaviour.

The peer group can influence what the child values, knows, wears, eats, and learns. The extent of this influence, however, depends on other situational constraints, such as the age and personality of children and the nature of the group (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). Socialization is particularly important for children with disabilities, and it is the reason many programs include peers who are typically developing in special education programs or include children with disabilities in general education classrooms.

In its most acceptable form, the peer group is a healthy coming-of age arbiter, by which children grasp negotiating skills and learn to deal with hostility and to solve problems in a social context. In its most destructive mode, the peer group can demand blind obedience to a group norm, which can result in socially alienated gangs with pathological outlooks (Haward & Medway, 2004). Despite so much change in today's society, the fundamental tasks of growing up still endure - to find a place in a valued group that gives a sense of belonging; to identify and master tasks that are generally recognized as having value and therefore can earn respect by acquiring skill to cope with them; to acquire a sense of worth as a person;

and to develop reliable and predictable relationships with other people, especially a few close friends and loved ones (Mlowasa, Kalimanasi & Matias, 2014).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The low academic performance in schools is brought the need to investigate the factors influencing learning. The peer group influence is one of the factors causing low academic performance. During adolescence, the amount of influence that peer group have on one's academic achievement is enormous. The ways and manners by which peer influence affects adolescents academic performance needs to be researched and documented. This will assist parents and counselors to understand the pattern of peer influence and ways to curb negative influence.

There is need to look into peer group relationship and individual approach to learning, membership of the peer group they belong and find out how factors such as parent, socio-economic status and socio-cultural background determine their membership in a group.

### **Purpose of the Study**

- i. To investigate the influence of peer group on students' academic performance in secondary schools.
- ii. To examine the influence of economic status of peers on students' academic performance in secondary schools.

### **Research Hypotheses**

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between peer group influence and students' academic performance in secondary schools.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between economic status of peer group and students' academic performance in secondary schools.

### **Literature Review**

A peer group consists of people or individuals that are within ages that are close in years, for instance between range of one to four years, the school serves as primary setting for the membership of peer group, they may be in the same class, the same sex and close interaction is of equals. It is generally observed that peer group has a lot of influence on students. This is seen from the role played by the peer group in the life and learning of a child, it is believed that students feel more comfortable and relaxed among fellow students. A child who is brilliant and surrounded by dull friends would lose interest in learning. On the other hand, a peer group which inclined to study would have positive effect on a dull member towards learning and stimulate his/her interest on learning. Creswell (2009) wrote that the nature of a peer group determines the impact on the motivation of and achievements of its member.

The attractiveness of the group, the nature of conformity demanded by the group and the morals of the group determine whether a group is likely to have positive or negative impact on members' motivation and achievement. If the atmosphere of the group is warm, understanding and supportive, the group influence or motivation, task performance and achievement will most likely be positive. A hostile atmosphere, constant frustration and frequent conflicts produce a negative impact not only on the member's growth and behaviour but also on his motivation to work and achievement. The kind of person a child is dictates the type of group he/she is in, as children tend to imitate each other. De Guzman (2007) also shares the same view that imitation of behaviour in a group occurs when a person acts in a way that is likely to be joined by the rest of the group. Students who are playful but have academic traits should be encouraged to join a study inclined group.

Ide, Parkerson, Haerted & Walberg (2006) found that peers were involved in the socialization of novices, considerable sociable interactions and the maintenance of loose, unwritten code of conduct to be followed by those who wished to remain in the group. This is more important to the secondary school level. There

are students who found to be dull in their primary school but became brilliant in secondary school because of peer group influence. Dull students should be identified from playful students. Therefore, attention should be concentrated on students in their first three years of secondary education as these are the most easily influenced by peer groups. This is because most of the time these students do not have a set goal until they get to higher level when they are faced with reality of WAEC and subsequent examinations. This group also tends to imitate each other easily. They fear rejection by the group. Kessler (2012) feels that acceptance by a peer group improves social relations. Also response rate of students are lower in the junior secondary school. Teachers are more likely to hold the attention of students in the SSS than students in JSS. However, the teachers could use the peer group to get the needed responses in the JSS class.

The term adolescence is derived from Latin word *adolescere* which means 'growing up'. It is a period of transition in which the individual transforms from childhood to adulthood. It is also regarded as the physical and mental human development that occurs between childhood and adulthood. The transition involves biological (i.e. puberty), social and psychological changes. Adolescence can be seen as a stage in the life span through which individual pass before adulthood. It is also a period of great emotional stress. Whatever happens during this developmental stage goes a long way in affecting the individual positive or negative. These changes are associated with involvement with one's peers. As children grow, develop and move into early adolescence, involvement with peer and attraction of peer identification increases. Adolescent are socialized by the people they associate with. Through daily interaction over the course of many years, acceptable social customs are taught and accepted by adolescents as the right norms. Understanding the way social interaction affect academic achievement adolescents is important for parents, educators and policy makers (Papalia, Olds, Feldman & Kruk, 2004).

Peer group influence, especially during adolescence and early adulthood is a powerful force for both pro-social and anti-social development. Ryan and Deci (2000) found out that as children grow and move to adulthood, involvement with and influence of peer identification increase as modeling value of the family decreases. In most cases, peer tends to replace the modeling value of the family context during early childhood. As a result of the social acknowledgement that adolescents look for, they are under a certain amount of pressure that drives them to abide by the peers convictions or rejections. The influence of peer group on adolescents' academic performance has also been a subject of intense study. Santrok (2008) came up with the finding that strong relationships do exist between school adjustment behaviour and peer acceptance. It was also found that strong and quality peer associations are related to poor or good academic performance and successful school transition. Peer influence is one of the most frequently referred to forms of negative peer influence it is particularly common because most adolescent are forced to spend large amount of time in fixed groups (schools and sub groups within them) regardless of their opinion of these groups. In addition to this, they lack the maturity to handle it. Also adolescents' naturally wish to behave negatively towards those who are not members of their own peer groups. However, adolescent can also have positive effects. For example if one is involved with a group of people that are ambitious and working to succeed, one might feel pressured to follow suit to avoid feeling excluded from the group. In this way, the adolescent is influenced positively.

### Methodology

The study is a descriptive research study. This type of descriptive research employed in this study is the survey research design. The study covered Ilorin metropolis of Kwara state, the population for the study consisted all JSS III students in Ilorin metropolis of Kwara State. Random sampling technique was used to select schools for the study. Out of the existing public secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis, five secondary schools were randomly selected for this study. The researcher made use of only JSS III students because this is where the influence is fully manifested considering their age range between 12 and 16 years, which falls under adolescent stage. The main instrument used for the study was questionnaire, which was prepared in two parts. Part one contained items on personal data about each

respondent, while part two contained other set of items on different factors which can influence the respondents in reference to their peer group. The instrument used for data collection was validated by experts in Educational Test and Measurement to check the face and content validity of the instrument. The split-half method of testing reliability was used to ensure the reliability of the instrument. The scores gotten were correlated using Person Product moment correlation co-efficient and a co-efficient reliability of 0.69 was arrived at. The administration of the instrument for the study was carried out by the researcher by taking copies of the questionnaire to the respondents concerned with the instruction on how to fill them. The data collected from the respondents were analysed using Pearson product moment correlation statistics at 0.05 level of significance.

### Results

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between peer group influence and students' academic performance in secondary schools.

**Table 1: Peer group influence and students' academic performance in secondary schools**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	Calc. r-value	Critical r-value	Decision
Peer Group.	200	13.7800	2.37	198	0.610*	0.116	Rejected
Students' Academic Perf.	200	13.9350	1.84				

Table 1 shows the relationship between the influence of the peer group on academic performance of secondary school students. Based on the analysis of the results, it indicated that the calculated r of 0.610 is greater than the critical r of 0.116 at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the hypothesis is hereby rejected. Meaning that, the influence of peer group has relationship on the academic performance of secondary school students.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between economic status of peer group and students' academic performance in secondary schools

**Table 2: Economic status of peer group and students' academic performance in secondary schools**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	Calc. r-value	Critical r-value	Decision
Economic Status	200	13.7800	2.37	198	0.819*	0.116	Rejected
Students' Academic Perf.	200	13.7850	2.01				

Table 2 shows the relationship between the impact that economic status of peers and academic performance of secondary school students. Based on the analysis of the results, it indicated that the calculated r of 0.819 is greater than the critical r of 0.116 at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the hypothesis is hereby rejected. Meaning that economic status of peers had significant influence on the academic performance of secondary school students.

### Discussion of the Findings

There was a significant relationship between peer group influence and students' academic performance in secondary schools. Swanson, Edwards and Spencer (2010) that positive peer influence on academic performance depends on adolescent self-identity, self-esteem and self-reliance. Peer influence can mobilize adolescents' energy and motivate for success. Peer can and do act as positive role models. Negative behaviour that his or her values might otherwise reject. If an adolescent is influenced negatively from peer, it affects their academic performance. Stronger adolescents do have an impact on their peers and actually help improve the overall academic performance. If adolescents are friends to secondary



school dropouts, they have tendency to be absent from school, have lower grades and less positive attitudes towards schools, they are less popular and less likely to plan to attend higher institutions. If dropout maintains contact with friends who have stayed in schools, however, these friends may provide moral support for returning to school. Attitudes and aspiration of peers as well as peers' expectations and standards affect individual's efforts and achievement in school. For many secondary school students, achieving in school is in direct conflict with peer acceptance. For many adolescent, friendships are critical interpersonal bridges that move them towards psychological growth and maturity, allowing social compassion, influences the development of self-evaluations. However, it is through the peer group that adolescent are most likely to be introduced to problem behaviour such as drinking, smoking, delinquency and low academic performance (Temitope & Christy, 2015). An abundance of literature has suggested that there is considerable individual variation regarding cognitive skill development during adolescents as it relates to peer influence. Adolescents who have positive peer influence generates more alternative solution to problem, proposed more mature solution and are less aggressive than adolescent who are influenced negatively.

There was a significant relationship between economic status of peer group and students' academic performance in secondary schools. Adolescents are attracted to join peer groups because of economic status such groups provide in order to be empowered academically, vocationally, psychological or otherwise and give the feedback about the appropriateness of their emotions especially when adolescent are highly stressed or under stressed (Thungu, Wander, Gachie & Alumande, 2008).

### Conclusion

Learning does not occur in isolation but through interaction with certain factors one of which is the peer group. It can therefore be said that the peer group, which a child interacts with will definitely affect learning. The extent to which the peer group determines the academic ability of students had been investigated in this study. Thus, a dull student may become study inclined when the he finds himself in a group that encourages effective learning.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study, a number of recommendations could be made as follows:

- i) Teachers should understand that the peer group is an important factor in child's learning and therefore should use it to encourage learning in order to enhance good academic performance.
- ii) Parents and teachers should provide adequate guidance to adolescents to help them understand how the friends they keep can either positively or negatively influence their academic performance in school
- iii) Teacher should use the peer groups a study group to bring about effective classroom interaction. The teacher must neither be too strict nor too permissive so as to encourage good teacher-student relationship.
- iv) Students should endeavour to form or join groups that are study inclined and encourage learning so that their learning would be effective.

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