

Peer Group and Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Sagbama and Ekeremor Local Government Area, of Bayelsa State

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Abstract

This paper is on peer group and academic performance of secondary school students in Sagbama and Ekeremor Local Government Areas, of Bayelsa State. Two objectives, translated to research questions and hypotheses defined the study. In this study, descriptive survey method of research was used to generate useful information. The study was carried out in Sagbama and Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The research was focused only on the secondary school students in the selected Local Government Areas of Bayelsa State. The population for this study consists of all the SS2 Students in the public Secondary Schools. Six secondary schools (three each from the two local government areas) with a total of 575 Students. A sample size of 200 students were drawn from the six (6) public secondary schools. The simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. The instrument for data collection was a set of questions in a questionnaire titled "Peer Group Influence and Academic Performance of Secondary School Students Questionnaire (PGIAPSSSQ)" The questionnaire was designed based on the research questions. The total number of items in the questionnaire are twelve (12) four each. The result showed that there is no significant effect on the extent which peer group influences students based on gender. This means that peer group influence on academic performance of students based on gender is not significant. Also, there is no significance in the extent to which peer group influence student from intact and broken homes. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. It was recommended among others that the principals of the schools should develop a cordial teacher/student's relationship and understand the needs of their students. Students should be encouraged to choose their friends wisely as some may have negative influence on their academic performance, especially those who sneak out of school, use drugs and those who do not attend school regularly.

Key Words: *Peer Group, Academic Performance, Students, Secondary Schools, Influence, Broken Homes, Intact Homes, and School administrators*

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 (Wikipedia). Peer group play a large role in the social and emotional development of adolescents. Their influence begins at an early age and increases through the teenage years, it is natural, healthy and important for adolescents to have and rely on friends as they grow and mature. A peer could be anyone you look

up to in behaviour or someone who you would think is equal to your age or ability (Hardcastle, 2002). 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 and affiliation to a group in the society. Peer relationships are common in the schools and homes and this plays important roles in the socialization of children in Nigeria. Students in the midst of their group transformed into the true picture of their behavior; feel more comfortable among fellow students but feel morose at home or at the presence of teacher. The most important influence on student behavior of learning is not always the teacher but the fellow students. With this, there is need to identify the influence of peer group on learning, although there are other factors that can influence the learning but the role played by peer groups is more than other factors because the attitude of students to learning are not always encouraging. Most children and adolescents in this position do not discriminate about the type of group they join. They will often turn to a group simply because the group accepts them, even if the group is involved in negative tendency.

Smith and Pellegrino (2001) are of the opinion that the need or affection or closeness is often greater than the need to do the right thing for some adolescents who feel isolated and abandoned by members of the family. The family is the child's first place of contact with the world. The child as a result, acquires initial education and socialization from parents and other significant persons in the family. Agulana (2000) pointed out that the family lays the psychological, moral, and spiritual foundation in the overall development of the child. Structurally, family/homes is either broken or intact. A broken home in this context is one that is not structurally intact, as a result of divorce, separation, death of one of parent and illegitimacy. According to Frazer (2004), psychological home conditions arise mainly from illegitimacy of children, the label of adopted child, broken homes, divorce and parental deprivation. Such abnormal conditions of the home, are likely to have a detrimental effect on school performance of the child he asserts. Life, in a single parent family or broken home can be stressful for both the child and the parent. Such families are faced with challenges of inadequate financial resources (children defense fund 2004). Schults (2006) noted that if adolescents from unstable homes are to be compared with those from stable homes, it would be seen that the former have more social, academic and emotional problems. Rochlepartain (2003) is of the opinion that the family and its structure play a great role in children's academic performance. Levin (2001) states that parents are probably the actor with the clearest un-dimensional interest in a high level of their children's academic performance. To some extent, there is simple evidence to show the marital instability brings about stress, tension, lack of motivation and frustration obviously, these manifestations act negatively on a child's academic performance. Johnson (2005) asserts that children of unmarried parents /separated families often fail and are at risk emotionally. However, this may not be completely applicable in all cases of broken homes. Some children irrespective of home background or structure may work hard and become successful in life. Moreover, Ayodele (2007) stated that the environment where a child finds himself herself goes a long way in determining his/her learning ability and ultimately his academic performance in school.

Gronlund (1990), 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 or negative 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. Peer group influence also prompt students to form clique with nicknames such as, Terror, Shark, Snake, Tempo, Blue Queen, Black angel etc. students are always anxious to initiate their peers whether good or bad, they would want to go to the church or mosque due to their peer influences. They may also join different clubs like Girls Guides, Boys Scout, Brigade, Red Cross, etc. (Owuamanam, 2001). The peer group has their own "acceptance" which they have to consider before a child could be accepted or rejected from a group. Some of these characteristics that are likely to make a child to be accepted to a group are friendship, sociability and introversion. Much may also depend on what a particular group values as qualities in its members (Piaget, 1998).

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study is set out to investigate peer groups influence and academic performance of secondary of secondary school students in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area to Rivers State. However, the specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the extent to which peer group influence the academic performance based on gender.
2. Ascertain the extent to which peer group influence the academic performance of students from intact and broken homes.

Research Questions

The research is tailored to find answer to the following questions

- i. To what extent does peer group influence academic performance based on gender?
- ii. To what extent does peer group influence academic performance of students from intact and broken homes?

Hypotheses

Ho 1: There is no significant in the extent to which peer group influence students based on gender.

Ho 2: There is no significant in the extent to which peer group influence students from intact and broken home.

The Study will benefit all categories of life builders who battle in education especially in the academic performance of children. It will be helpful in determining some of the factors associated to the peer group to their academic performance. The factors when identified will form a base for proffering appropriate solutions to parents and teachers to beware of ways they can direct peer group.

Literature Review

Concept of Peer Group

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 second 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. Katz (1960) wrote that the nature of a peer group determined the impact on the motivation of and achievements of its member. The attractiveness of the peer group, the nature conformity

demanding 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 on motivation, 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.

Bandura (2003) noted that through observing and imitating the behaviour of others, learners can by-pass much wasteful random behaviour and come close to reproducing the behaviors of which members are recognized. A child may not be dull but playful. If he is well monitored and he falls into a group of brilliant students who are not playful, he imitates them and this changes his attitudes towards learning for better. This is why it is important for teachers to be able to distinguish a playful child from dull one. Dull students should be identified from playful students. Therefore, attention should be concentrated on students in their first three years of secondary school education as these are the most easily influenced by peer group. This is because most of the time those students do not have a set goal until get to higher level when they are faced with reality of WAEC and other subsequent examinations.

Concept of Academic Performance

Academic performance of a child could be defined as the learning outcomes of the child. This includes the knowledge, skills and ideas, acquired and obtained through their course of study within and outside the classroom situation (Epunam, 1999). It is the outcome of determination, hard work, of student in academic pursuit. Pandney, (2008) defined academic achievement as the performance of the pupils in the subjects they study in the school. This determines the pupils' status in the class. This gives children an opportunity to develop their talents, improve their grades and prepare for future academic challenges. Academic performance refers to a person's performance in a given academic area (e.g. reading or language arts, mathematics, science and other areas of human learning. Academic performance relates to academic subjects a child studies in school and the skills the child is expected to master in each (Kathryn, 2010). Academic performance refers to excellence in all academic discipline, in a class as well as extracurricular activities. It includes excellence in sporting behaviour, it includes excellence in sporting behaviour, confidence, communication skills, and others, Steinberger (2005) posit that academic performance encompasses students' ability and performance; it is multidimensional; it is intricately related to human growth and cognitive, emotional and social physical development; it reflects the whole child; it is not related to a single instance, but occurs across time and levels, through a student's life in public school and into postsecondary years and working life. Academic performance refers to how well a student is accomplishing his tasks and studies. Academic performance in school is evaluated in a number of ways. For regular grading student students demonstrate their knowledge by taking written and oral tests, performing presentations, submission of homework and participating in class activities and discussion. Teachers evaluate in the form of assignment, test and examination to describe how well a student has done. Poor academic achievement is a performance that is adjudged by the examined and some significant others as falling below an expected standard (Adesemowo, 2005). Izundu (2005) pointed out that some environmental variables in a home influence the learning capabilities of a child either positively or negatively and thus affect their academic performances. Some of the variables include parental socio-economic status, level of parental supervision of children, location home, library facility among others.

Concept of Gender

Gender according to Pollard and Morgan (2002) refers to the socially constructed expectation for male and female behaviour which prescribes a division of labor and responsibilities between males and females granting of different rights and obligation to them. Gender also describes social and historical constructs for masculine and feminine roles, behaviors, attributes and ideologies, which connote some notion of biological sex (Azikiwe, 2001). According to World Health Organization (WHO), gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norm, behaviors and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy as well as relationship with each other. Gender is defined by Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) as the relations between men and women both perceptual and material. Gender is not biological, as a result of social characteristics of either women or men, but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies, and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution (FAO 1997).

Concept of Intact and Broken Homes

The home is a first contact of a children life hence it is a place where comfort, love, tranquility and refuge are expected to be adequately and unconditionally provided, it is also a place where people congregate their living practices. Home is a primary agent of socialization and internalization, a child's social outlooks, educational agilities and achievements coupled with his intelligence is a reflection of his home setting and which usually associated with his family background in totality. As a result of these, home is any child's environment of which the child cannot do without referring to at one time or the other as regards to certain issues. Therefore, home is a determining factor in any child's behaviour and thus influences his academic performance. The home consists of the children's vicinity and apartment where they rest their head. It is abundantly clear that a successful learning and reading requires a conducive and decent atmosphere. Therefore, Intact Home is a home where parents and children live in harmony, a home characterized by love, care, affection and control. A home where there is peace harmony love and blessings. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary intact home refers to families in which both biological parents are present in a home. Homes where family do not have any emotional problems which could lead to broken home. Many people different definitions of what a broke home is. Every definition matters. Polanen (1990) maintains that although a broken home is usually taken to mean a home where one parent has been by certain cause, a home can still be broken with both parents present. She argues that if there is no communication, interaction or investment in each other's lives by the couple, the home is broken and becomes a house with roommates. According to Saheed (1988), broken home consists of a family whose members are separated or divorced. It consists of family sundered by divorce, separation or desertion of a parent(s).

Methodology

In this study, descriptive survey method of research was used to generate primary data since the study used qualitative variables instead of quantitative variables. Survey research is a kind of research which is used for the assessment of public opinion by use of a questionnaire. Since this study intends to obtain information from students on the peer influence on academic performance, the use of descriptive survey is considered appropriate. The population for this study consists of all the SS2 Students in the public Secondary Schools in Sagbama and Ekeremor Local government areas and six (6) public schools with a total of 575 SS2 Students were selected.

A sample size of 200 students drawn from six (6) selected public secondary schools in the two Local Government Areas of Bayelsa State was used for the study. The simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample size for the study.

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Peer Group Influence and Academic Performance of Secondary School Students Questionnaire (PGIAPSSSQ)". The instrument for the study was administered on the respondents through direct delivery method. The researcher administered the instrument directly on the respondents with the assistance of one research assistant. Filled copies of the instrument were retrieved by the researcher in the same spot to ensure 100% retrieval case. Retrieved instrument was later scored and collated for data analysis.

The study adopted qualitative descriptive analysis. The research questions were answered using simple percentage. The simple percentage method of analyzing data looks at raw streams of data in form of a percentage. For the hypotheses, a Z-test was used to determine the extent to which peer group influence students based on gender. It determines the extent to which peer group influence students from intact and broken home. For (HO3) the same Z-test was also used to establish the significant in the extent to which peer group influence students based on age.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: To what extent does peer group influence academic performance based on gender?

Table 1: Extent peer group influence academic performance based on gender

S/N	ITEMS	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	TOTAL
1.	Peer group influence male students negatively than female students in school	90 (45%)	68 (35%)	25 (12.5%)	17 (8.5%)	200
2.	Peer group influence female students negatively than male students in school	28 (14%)	26 (13%)	57 (28.5%)	89 (44%)	200
3.	Male students who belong to peer group develop discipline which is key in learning than the female students.	18 (9%)	20 (10%)	68 (34%)	94 (47%)	200
4.	Peer group enhances respect among female students which motivate them to learn than male students.	80 (40%)	96 (48%)	14 (7%)	10 (5%)	200

Table 1 shows the responses of the respondents to questions bothering on the extent peer group influence academic performance based on gender. From the table, item 1 shows very high extent that peer group influence male students negatively than female students in the school. On the other hand, item 2, 3 and 4 reveals that the extent to which peer group influence female students negatively is low and that peer group enhances respect among female students which motivate them to learn than male students. This implies that peer group influence the female students in secondary schools of Sagbama and Ekeremor local government area in positively way of learning than male students.

Research Question 2: To what extent does peer group influence academic performance of students from intact and broken homes?

Table 2: Extent peer group influence academic performance of students from intact and broken homes

S/N	ITEMS	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	TOTAL
1.	I joined group because my mum and dad have separated no one counsel me on the type of group to join	90 (45%)	68 (35%)	25 (12.5%)	17 (8.5%)	200
2.	I take academic advice from my peer group because I live with my father and not mother, he doesn't know anything concerning my education	28 (14%)	26 (13%)	57 (28.5%)	89 (44%)	200
3.	Am not performing well in school because I stayed with my mother and she is not bothered about my education	18 (9%)	20 (10%)	68 (34%)	94 (47%)	200
4.	I perform well in school because I live with my parents	80 (40%)	96 (48%)	14 (7%)	10 (5%)	200

Table 2 is concerned with questions and responses on the extent peer group influence academic performance of students from intact and broken homes. Item 1 shows that 55% of the respondents join peer group because mum and dad have separated no one counsel them on the type of group to join to a very low extent. 39.5% take academic advice from peer group because they live with their fathers and not mothers to a very low extent. 49% not performing well in school because they stayed with their mothers, who is not bothered about education to a very low extent. Item 4 revealed that 29% of the respondents noted that they perform well in school because they live with their parents to a very high extent. 28% of the respondents believed that they perform well in school because they live with their parents to a high extent. This means that the extent to which peer group influence academic performance of students from intact and broken homes is very low.

Hypotheses

HO1: There is no significant in the extent to which per group influence students based on gender

Table 3 Correlation Analysis

Variable	N	r-cal	r-tab	Remarks
Peer group influence based on gender	200	0.252	0.195	Significant (reject Ho)

Significant at the 0.05 level

The correction analysis shows r-cal value of 0.25 as greater than r-tabulated value of 0.195, hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. The r-cal value of 0.252 shows positive correlation between peer group influence and gender. The positive correlation suggests that there is no significant in the extent which peer group influence students based on gender. This means that peer group influence academic performance of students based on gender.

HO2: There is no significant in the extent to which peer group influence student from intact and broken homes.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	z-cal	z-tab	Remarks
Peer group influence based intact and broken homes	39	31.28	3.73	118	1.96	1.29	Significant (reject Ho)

The Z-table shows that the z-cal value of 1.96 is greater than the z-tab value of 1.29 which a positive correlation. This means that there is no significant in the extent to which peer group influence student from intact and broken homes. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

Peer group influence on academic performance based on gender

The result from table 4.1.1 indicates that the extent to which peer group influence male students negatively to a very high extent. The result also reveals that the extent to which peer group influence female students negatively is low and that peer group enhances respect among female students which motivate them to learn than male students. This implies that peer group influence the female students in secondary schools of Sagbama and Ekeremor Local Government Areas in Bayelsa state positively in their school performance than male students. Gender may have positive and negative influence on in-school students. The World Health Organization defines gender as the socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities and attributes that a particular society considers for men and women. To Woolfolk (2010) gender usually refers to traits and behaviours that a particular culture judges to be appropriate for men and women. Again, the finding of this study confirms that of Cross and Madson (2007) who found out that although the majority of the researches shows that parent attachment is stronger in female, females are mostly attached to their parents, and relations who advise them often, they draw more support from them than boys because female may be more active in the pursuit of relatedness in the context of their peer relations. The influence of sex (gender) on academic performance has also been an issue of concern to most researchers. This is because 'gender appears to have some powerful effect on learning. According to Fauto-Sterling (2005) and (2005) suggest no significant difference in cognitive ability between males and females. Although research results vary widely the following conclusions have been drawn. Males are more abstract learners, females have more anxiety about study success, males are more instructive, and females are more analytical and organized (Bielinska & Davison 2003). However, the finding of this study disconfirms that of Hay and Ashman (2003) who concluded that females were more influenced by peer relations than males. His study revealed that female students are influence negatively by their peers. The difference in the result could be because of the difference in the population of the two studies. It has also been revealed that girls do better in school, get higher grades and can graduate from high school at a higher level than boys (Aryana, 2010). From the on-going, adolescent boys and girls exhibit differences in behavioural patterns regarding their relationship with their peers, and academic performance.

Peer group influence on academic performance of students from intact and broken homes

The finding of the study revealed the extent peer group influence academic performance of students from intact and broken homes. Students from Sagbama and Ekeremor local government areas in Bayelsa State are mostly students from intact homes, the study shows that very few are

from broken homes. This means that the extent to which peer group influence academic performance of students from intact and broken homes is very low. Life, in a single parent family or broken home can be stressful for both the child and the parent. Such families are faced with challenges of inadequate financial resources (children defense fund2004). Schults (2006) noted that if adolescents from unstable homes are to be compared with those from stable homes, it would be seen that the former have more social, academic and emotional problems.

CONCLUSION

The results obtained revealed that peer group influence male students negatively than female students. The findings of the study also showed that peer group influence on students from intact and broken homes was very low. The study concluded that peer group influence students of the same age mate because most students believed in their age mate than their parents and teachers in secondary schools in Sagbama and Ekeremor local government areas of Bayelsa state. The researcher recommended that parents and teachers should put hands together to assist students and also guidance and counselors should be made available in secondary schools in the two local government areas that would help to guide and counsel students on the type of groups they join.

Recommendations

It is a well-respected practice that in an exercise of this nature, well thought out solutions or recommendations be made. Thus, the following recommendations are made based on findings:

1. Teachers, parents/guardians and government should improve the learning environment for the students and motivate them. There is need for teachers to encourage interaction that may promote discussion of issues that are of paramount importance for academic excellence.
2. The government should provide Guidance and counselling services so that they can guide and counsel the students.

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