PEER INFLUENCE AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

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Abstract

This research examined how peer influence predicts academic success among 979 secondary students from government, government-aided, and private schools. The underlying educational aim is to foster intelligence and self-directed learning. Analysis confirmed that peer influence is a significant factor in achievement, especially for girls across all school types and for boys in government-aided schools. A distinct finding was that girls achieved higher grades than boys across every school category.. The findings suggest that educational contexts must be actively structured to leverage positive peer dynamics to foster belonging, motivation, and ultimately, academic excellence.

Keywords*: Peer Influence, Personal Learning Journey, Positive Peer Dynamics*

Introduction

Education extends beyond knowledge acquisition, aiming to cultivate intelligence and optimism in students. Success in both studies and careers increasingly depends on students' ability to manage their personal learning journey proactively, a requirement for continuous education. The learning process is influenced by the interaction of two key resource sets: students' intellectual and psycho-social resources (ability, motivation, attitudes, shaped by background factors) and the learning experiences offered by the school (instructional resources like teachers, facilities, and curriculum). Therefore, effective learning research must examine how these resource sets and their interplay.

Peer Influence

A peer group consists of individuals who share similar interests, age, background, and social standing. The group of peers is a source of affection empathy, understanding, and an experimental location. Though influential throughout life, peers defined as people sharing the same age or social status (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2016) is most vital during youth. The peer group serves as a child's initial foray into a social group outside the home, offering a space to try and earn approval and belonging. Among the most significant social influences on adolescent conduct are peer groups, shaping everything from ordinary choices about clothing and music to major decisions regarding short- and long-term educational goals. During the formative adolescent years, peers are arguably even more important than parents, teachers, and counsellors, and the peer-influenced decisions of youth can have long-lasting

consequences (Coleman, 1966; Sewell, Haller and Portes, 1969; Sewell, Haller and Ohlendorf, 1970). Teenagers often emulate their mates in whatever behaviour, especially those that attract them, as socialisation refers only to behavior changes, behaviors that result from interactions with other people, and those that arise from experiences, a child learns more by interaction with peers. As a structured academic institution, the school hones an individual's behavior, preparing them for the demands of occupational socialization.

Peer group, formed in school around shared interests, is the most significant socializing agent for adolescents. Through long-term interaction, including role-play, peers teach each other social customs, skills, and knowledge. The academic success of a child is strongly affected by both adults and other children, but the type of peer group chosen is often the biggest predictor of this influence. Because the peer group's impact is immense during adolescence, the influence can lead to either positive or negative academic outcomes; unchecked association with detrimental peers can result in serious negative consequences.

Need for the Current Research

Intellectual capacity is widely regarded to anticipate academic achievement (Poropat, 2009). Previous research has established the most reliable indicator of perseverance in learning (Hartigan and Wigdor, 1989; Gottfredson, 1997; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Duckworth et al., 2007). While the link between intellectual ability and academic success is acknowledged and often prioritized, research increasingly suggests that IQ alone is insufficient to predict the full scope of scholastic achievement and later-life performance. This predictive gap necessitates a broader approach. Consequently, this study addresses the need to investigate non-intellectual factors, such as peer influence, and quantify their contribution to determining student academic outcomes.

Review of Related Literature

According to Landau (2002) an adolescent's expectancy of success was the primary predictor of academic effort and grades. The sense of community and assistance provided by peers showed a major correlation with the outcomes mentioned. Peer interactions significantly influence student achievement; classmates affect outcomes not only through collaborative discussions and attitudes toward learning but also through simple proximity and shared motivation. Economists have investigated peer effects for a variety of peer types including schoolmates (Evans and others, 1992; Hanushek and others, 2003), roommates Sacerdote 2001; Zimmerman, 2003; Hoel and others, 2005; McEwan and Soderberg, 2006), Ryan (2000) found that peer groups are influential regarding changes in students' intrinsic value for school (i.e. liking and enjoying) as well as achievement (i.e. report card grades). It was found that associating with friends who have a positive effect toward school enhanced

students' own satisfaction with school, whereas associating with friends who have a negative affect toward school decreased it (Ryan, 2000).

A peer group is fundamentally a small, intimate circle of friends characterized by mutual interests, frequent interaction, and shared views. As children transition into adolescence, the dynamics of their social world shift significantly; they begin to prioritize time with these friends over their parents. Defined by equality of status and approximate age, this group becomes highly influential. Its impact is notably significant across educational stages, promoting vital early skills such as pre-reading and linguistic ability, and fostering the commitment necessary for academic and eventual professional success.

The study by Akhtar and Aziz (2011) explored the effect of peer and parent pressure on the academic achievement of university students. The study's population consisted of both male and female master's students at the university, 156 students were selected by using a cluster sampling technique from three departments of the University (Business Administration, Computer Science and Economics) as a sample for the study. The results indicated that parental expectations correlated positively with student achievement. Conversely, peer pressure negatively affected academic outcomes, an impact that was especially notable for women in the university setting.

Statement of the Problem

Extensive review of the existing literature pertinent to this field revealed specific gaps in current understanding. Driven by the need to address these lacunae, this investigation was conceptualized.

The Problem is Stated as here Under

Peer Influence and Academic Achievement of Students at the Secondary Level

Methodology

Population

The teaching and learning environment is largely dictated by a school's category and its available resources. Recognizing that these factors significantly influence academic dynamics, the investigator needed a sampling strategy that captured this variability. Consequently, the study was structured to systematically select student samples from three distinct institutional categories: government, government-aided, and private schools.

Sample and Sample Technique

The study targets secondary-level students from government, government-aided, and private schools, with the sample intended to be selected using a random sampling method.

The study utilized a total sample of 979 students who were divided nearly equally by gender (483 boys and 496 girls). The participants were drawn evenly from three school

categories: Government (325 students), Government-aided (326 students), and Private (328 students). Gender distribution within each school type was also balanced, with slight variations (Government and Government-aided schools had 166 girls each, while Private schools had 164 boys and 164 girls).

Objectives of the Study

- To investigate the inherent nature of the relationship between peer influence and students' academic success.
- To determine the strength and magnitude of the effect peer influence has on student academic achievement.
- To analyze the correlation between the degree of peer influence experienced by students and their subsequent academic outcomes.
- To identify the dynamics through which peer influence operates to affect scholastic performance.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis will be based on the theories that have been formulated for this study. Multivariate statistical analysis and multiple variables are included in the study.

Hypothesis of the Study

(1) There will be a significant and positive relationship between the level of peer influence and the academic achievement of secondary students across government, government-aided, and private schools.

(II) There will be no significant difference in the academic performance of secondary students when comparing those in government, government-aided, and private schools.

(III) There will be no significant difference in peer influence of students at the secondary level across government, government-aided, and private schools

Analysis

(I) There will be a significant and positive relationship between the level of peer influence and the academic achievement of secondary students across government, government-aided, and private schools.

Table 1 Correlation Analysis - Relationship between Independent Variables and Academic Achievement, Stratified by Gender and School Category (Secondary Level)

Step	School	Gender	Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	Coefficient of Determination	β Co-efficient	t value	Level of Significance
1	**Government**	**Boys**	Academic Achievement	Peer Influence	Excluded	0.15	1.64	NS
		Girls			0.76	0.21	3.05	0.001
2	Government Aided	**Boys**			0.88	0.29	7.94	0.001
		Girls			0.86	0.25	5.81	0.001
3	Private	Boys			Excluded	0.00	0.04	NS
		Girls			0.87	0.12	3.62	0.001

Peer influence exhibits varied importance across school types and genders regarding academic achievement: it is a less critical determinant for boys in government schools compared to parental involvement, but it is a contributing factor for girls in government schools (within a model explaining 76% of variance). For students in government-aided schools, peer influence is a significant and substantial predictor for boys (contributing to a model explaining 88% of variance) and is confirmed as a significant variable for girls (in a set explaining 86% of variance). In private schools, while correlated, peer influence does not serve as a significant independent predictor for boys, but it is a key variable that significantly contributes to the final predictive model explaining 87% of the achievement for girls.

(II) There will be no significant difference in the academic performance of secondary students when comparing those in government, government-aided, and private schools.

Table 2 Mean Difference Significance- Academic Comparison between Boys and Girls in Government Secondary Schools

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	SD	SEM	SED	CR	Level of Significance
Peer Influence	Boys	159	23.87	5.56	0.44	0.56	9.38	0.001
	Girls	166	29.13	4.53	0.35			
Academic Achievement	Boys	159	52.20	6.20	0.49	0.86	7.65	0.001
	Girls	166	58.80	9.02	0.70			

In government schools, the data reveals that girls significantly outperform boys across both the independent variable of peer influence and the dependent variable of academic achievement. This distinct performance gap suggests that the more structured environments typically associated with girls' activities namely, consistent focus within the home and under teacher supervision may contribute to heightened academic concentration. Conversely, boys, who may exhibit higher levels of restlessness or playfulness compared to girls their age,

demonstrate a relative lag in maturity and performance across key parameters necessary for optimal academic results.

Table 3 Summary of Gender Disparity in Academic Mean Scores (Government-Aided Secondary Schools)

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	SD	SEM	SED	CR	Level of Significance
Peer Influence	Boys	160	32.28	1.61	0.13	0.18	1.59	NS
	Girls	166	32.57	1.70	0.13			
Academic Achievement	Boys	160	74.06	7.49	0.59	0.93	3.04	0.001

Similar to the trend observed in government schools, data collected from government-aided institutions indicates that girls significantly outperform boys across both the peer influence variable and academic achievement. This pattern establishes female students as statistically superior to their male counterparts in this specific school category with respect to these measured parameters.

Table 4 Mean Difference Significance -Academic Comparison between Boys and Girls in Private Secondary Schools

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	SD	SEM	SED	CR	Level of Significance
Peer Influence	Boys	164	30.97	2.9	0.23	0.24	5.91	0.001
	Girls	164	32.41	1.01	0.08			
Academic Achievement	Boys	164	66.95	7.23	0.57	0.69	11.69	0.001
	Girls	164	74.98	5.01	0.39			

Female student's demonstrated significantly superior performance compared to male students on the measure of academic achievement and across all independent variables related to peer influence.

(III) There will be no significant difference in peer influence of students at the secondary level across government, government-aided, and private schools.

Table 5 Mean Difference Significance - Comparing Boys' Scores in Government and Government-Aided Secondary Schools

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	SD	SEM	SED	CR	Level of Significance
Peer Influence	Government	159	23.87	5.56	0.44	0.46	18.36	0.001
	Government-aided	160	32.28	1.61	0.13			
Academic Achievement	Government	159	52.20	6.20	0.49	0.77	28.40	0.001
	Government-aided	160	74.06	7.49	0.59			

When comparing boys from government schools to those in government-aided schools, the latter group consistently demonstrated significantly superior performance across all independent variables related to peer influence, resulting in higher academic achievement.

Table 6 Mean Difference Significance - Comparing Boys' Scores in Government andPrivate Secondary Schools

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	SD	SEM	SED	CR	Level of Significance
Peer Influence	Government	159	23.87	5.56	0.44	0.49	14.39	0.001
	Private	164	30.97	2.95	0.23			
Academic Achievement	Government	159	52.20	6.20	0.49	0.75	19.65	0.001
	Private	164	66.95	07.23	0.57			

A clear performance gap emerges when comparing boys from government and private schools, with private school boys performing significantly better academically. This disparity is largely attributable to the superior resources and environment afforded by the private sector. Since these institutions are managed by independent trusts and are financially autonomous, they can fully fund and maintain high-quality instructional and infrastructural facilities. This enhanced learning environment, combined with the likely factor of more educated and better-placed parents who enroll their children in private schools, collectively fosters the development of adequate knowledge and skills, directly contributing to their superior academic results.

Table 7 Mean Difference Significance -Comparing Boys' Scores in Government-Aided and Private Secondary Schools

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	SD	SEM	SED	CR	Level of Significance
Peer Influence	Government-aided	160	32.28	1.61	0.13	0.27	4.94	0.001
	Private	164	30.97	2.95	0.23			
Academic Achievement	Government-aided	160	74.06	7.49	0.59	0.82	8.70	0.001
	Private	164	66.95	7.23	0.57			

When comparing the academic outcomes of boys, those in government-aided schools demonstrate superior performance over boys in private schools. This edge exists despite the often better infrastructure of private institutions. The reason for this inversion may be that government-aided schools—which receive essential staffing support (salaries) from the state—can effectively leverage government-sponsored training and coaching facilities. This access to publicly funded supplementary resources may be crucial, enabling their male students to achieve better results than those attending purely private schools.

Findings

Regarding academic achievement for boys in government schools, while peer influence correlates positively and significantly with it, the regression analysis indicates that it does not contribute significantly as an independent predictor of their academic performance. This lack of significant influence is attributed to the students, suggesting that peers, who are similarly disadvantaged, do not exert a strong enough effect on academic outcomes. Consequently, peer influence is excluded from the final regression model, which finds parental involvement, self-regulated learning, and perseverance to be the key contributors.

The study revealed two striking patterns across the secondary level student population. First, a consistent gender disparity was observed: within every school category (government, government-aided, and private), girls significantly outperformed boys on academic achievement and scored higher on all independent variables related to peer influence. Second, an unexpected performance inversion emerged when comparing boys across the different school types. Specifically, boys in government-aided schools excelled beyond their counterparts in both government and private schools in terms of peer influence and academic achievement. This surprising result suggests that despite private schools often boasting superior infrastructure and facilities, the government-aided sector effectively leverages management oversight and state-provided resources for intensive student training, ultimately generating better student outcomes than those achieved in private institutions.

Educational Implications

- Actively structure positive peer interactions and collaborative tasks to leverage classmates' influence for skill and strategy development.
- Design the classroom context to foster a strong sense of belonging among peers, as this is critical for student motivation and self-efficacy.
- Encourage and facilitate peer-to-peer messaging that emphasizes effort and a growth mind set over fixed ability.
- Use peer support systems to help students identify and address learning barriers, promoting academic resilience and perseverance.

Conclusion

Adolescent academic success is significantly determined by the interaction among their cognitive processes, acquired skills, individual attitudes, and the surrounding school environment. Specifically, the sense of belonging, perseverance, motivation, and skill that students develop is formed through their experiences in the classroom, including their interactions with classmates. These peer contacts, alongside teacher interactions, contribute to the students' predominant belief in their own skill, which directly impacts their academic outcomes. The classroom context and structure are crucial for harnessing these non-cognitive factors, meaning educators must actively establish conditions that effectively utilize these peer dynamics to foster academic excellence, rather than viewing poor academic behavior as an unchangeable personal trait.

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