THE INFLUENCE OF PEER GROUP ON SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS ATTITUDE AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT IN UGHELLI NORTH LGA

BY

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

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. Socioeconomic status, ethnic identity, and parents’ occupations affect how families view themselves and the process by which they socialize their children (Bornstein, 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 behavior. 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 (Parke, 1990).

Peer influence on behavior gradually becomes more dominant. Harris (1998, 2002) and Rowe (1994) maintained that peer groups have an even stronger influence than that of parents, although that extreme position has been refuted by other researchers (Berk, 2005). 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 behavior. 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 (Harris, 1998; Hartup, 1983). 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 (Perry, 1987).

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 (Hamburg, 1992).

The oxford advanced learners dictionary (2001) defined peer group as a group of people of same age or social status. The peer group is the first social group outside the
home in which the child attempts to gain acceptance and recognition. Peer group is an important influence throughout one’s life but they are more critical during the developmental years of childhood and adolescence. Adolescents always emulate their mates in whatever form of behaviour they exhibit, particularly that which interest them thus, since socialization only refer to changes in behaviour, attitudes having their origin in interaction with other persons and those which occur through integration, a child learn more through interaction with peers.

Socialization being a life-long process cannot be limited to the family members alone. As a child grows older and more matured, it become more necessary for the external bodies to be involved in his/her life. The family is not expected to provide all the education required by the growing child. The school which is an established academic institution in which the behaviour of an individual is sharpened to get him/her equipped for occupational socialization. In the school system, the child gets into the social group of “like minds” and interest. As a result of the various attitudes, skills, knowledge is acquired through role-play. Peer group as an agent of socialization is the most important socializing is the most important socializing agent for the developing child. Peer group is the pivot of social change and during interaction peers; the child’s life is transformed from the helpless child into a mature adult.

Each peer group has its code of conduct which does not always conform to adult standards. The important thing is that each child takes his/her membership of the peer very serious and attempts to do anything to ensure he/she is accepted and recognized. Lack of acceptance by the peer disturbs the child especially at adolescent age. Some children have been known to do badly in school not because they lack the academic ability to do well but because they are disturbed by the fact they are not accepted by their peer group. What makes learning comparative is the fact that the child has equal status with the other children. There is an atmosphere of freedom in which each child
learns the way of the world from others. The peer group thus becomes more and more important to the child as he advances in age. Other ways in which the peer group can help the child include, teaching the culture of the society at large, making possible social mobility, providing opportunity for the child to play many social roles such as that of a leader, a follower, teacher or student. The peer group also help the child to win his/her independence easily from domination and set before him a goal which is more easily attainable than the expectation of adults. This in itself provides motivation for learning and is mainly responsible for the fact that all children at one stage or the other regard their membership of peer group as very important.

When the family is not supportive for instance, if the parents work extra jobs and are largely unavailable, their children may turn to their peer for emotional support. This also occur when the conflict between parents and children during adolescence or at any stage during a child’s development becomes so great that the child feels pushed away and seeks company elsewhere. Most children and adolescents in this position do not discriminate about the kind 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 (Peter and Anthony, 2001). The need for 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 their family being part of a peer group provides such individual with acceptance and security not available at home. In the Nigerian society today, the influence of peer group cannot be over emphasized in a child’s life most especially child education.

Peer group has in one way or the other influenced the life of children both academically, socially, morally, psychologically and otherwise. It helps just like any other agent of secondary school students in Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State. Socialization such as family, religion, mass media, and school among
others help in modifying the behaviour of the child. In conclusion, therefore the influence of peer group on the academic performance of secondary school students cannot be over emphasized. The peer group forms the main basis through which the child learns lot of empirical facts about his physical and social environment, acquisition of skills and value as well as attitude for a better future. It is against this background that this study is carried out to investigate the influence of peer group on selected secondary school students attitude and educational achievement in Ughelli North LGA.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Children socialize with the people with when they associate. Through interaction over many years, acceptable social customs are taught and fostered. Other children as well as adults can have a great impact on a broad range of issues in the child’s life including achievement in schools. The research is geared towards having a proper understanding of the way social interaction affect academic achievement and it is very important for parents, educators, and policy makers. The immediate environment such as peer, family, school, religion and other factors can encourage or discourage student’s academic performance. This research is thus an inquiry into the influence of peer group on the academic performance of secondary school students in Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State.

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. This study therefore seeks to address the aforementioned problems.
1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of peer group on selected secondary school students attitude and educational achievement in Ughelli North LGA. The purpose of this research work is to achieve the following objectives:

i. To examine the effects of peer group influence on academic performance of secondary school students.

ii. To discuss the challenges faced by secondary school students as a result of peer group influence.

iii. To determine whether peer influence has any effect on academic performance of children of children from broken homes.

iv. To find out whether peer influence determines variation in academic performance of male and female students.

v. To investigate whether age does determine the extent to which peer influence affects academic performance of students.

vi. To proffer lasting solution to the problems associated with peer group influence as it affects the academic performance of secondary school students.

1.4 Research Questions

To guide this study, the following research questions were formulated:

i. Does peer group influence have an effect on academic performance of secondary school students?

ii. Do secondary school students face challenges as a result of peer group influence?

iii. Does peer group influence have any effect on academic performance of children of children from broken homes?

iv. Does peer group influence determines variation in academic performance of male and female students?
v. Does age determine the extent to which peer influence affects academic performance of students?

vi. What do you think are the possible solution to the problems associated with peer group influence as it affects the academic performance of secondary school students?

1.5 Research Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study:

H01: There is no significant difference between peer group pressure and academic performance of secondary school students in Ughelli North L.G.A. of Delta State.

H02: There is no significant difference between those in private and government secondary schools as regards peer group influence on student academic performance.

1.6 Significance of Study

The research work is carried out to examine critically the influence of peer group on selected secondary school students attitude and educational achievement in Ughelli North LGA. Information gathered from this work is pertinent and will go a long way in unveiling the influence of peer group on the academic performance of students.

The importance of this study is to know whether peer group has any influence on the academic performance of a child as well as making an effect to strike a balance in the educational system in line with the national policy on education. This study will also provide an insight into the impact of peer group on academic performance of Secondary school students.

1.7 Scope of the Study
This research work focuses on the influence of peer group on selected secondary school students attitude and educational achievement in Ughelli North LGA. This research work covers Secondary school students in Delta State using Ughelli North Local Government Area as case study.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

Apart from time frame and shortage of finance, the major limitation to this research is the inability of the researcher to cover the whole areas in Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State as the title suggest.

1.9 Definition of Terms

Peer group: are children or adolescents who are of the same age or maturity, level and have regular contact with each other.

Peer influence: peer influence can be described as the pressure adolescents feel from their peers.

Adolescence: refers to the transitory period where a child moves to adulthood. The adolescent years fall within 12-18 years.

In-School Adolescents: refers to adolescents who are still in the formal school system as opposed to those who have dropped out of school.

Academic performance: refers to the intellectual ability of an individual when it comes to academic or education.
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