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The Effect of Peer Group Influence on Adolescents' Academic Performance: A Present-Day Challenge

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ABSTRACT

Peer group influence is an important social factor shaping adolescents' attitudes, behaviors, motivation, and educational outcomes. During adolescence, young people increasingly seek acceptance and recognition from their peers, making peer relationships particularly influential in their academic engagement and performance. This study examines the effect of peer group influence on adolescents' academic performance, with particular attention to how positive and negative peer interactions affect study habits, school attendance, classroom participation, motivation, and educational achievement. Positive peer influence can encourage collaborative learning, academic competition, information sharing, goal setting, and commitment to schoolwork, whereas negative peer influence may contribute to truancy, poor study habits, distraction, substance use, disruptive behavior, and reduced academic motivation. The contemporary social environment has further complicated peer influence through social media, online communities, and continuous digital interaction, which can extend peer pressure beyond the school environment. The study highlights the importance of family support, teacher guidance, school-based interventions, positive peer networks, and effective adolescent counseling in promoting healthy peer relationships and academic success. Understanding the mechanisms through which peer groups influence educational outcomes is essential for developing interventions that reduce harmful peer pressure while strengthening constructive peer support. Addressing peer influence as a present-day educational and social challenge may contribute to improved academic performance, psychosocial well-being, and successful adolescent development.

Keywords: Adolescents; Peer Group Influence; Academic Performance; Peer Pressure; Educational Achievement.

INTRODUCTION

Peer group is an important influence throughout one's life and is believed to be more critical during the developmental years of childhood and adolescence. The nature, magnitude, significance and implication of peer group influence in education is very crucial and important for the "productivity" of educational processes, and the organizational design of school systems in our Nigerian Educational sectors and around the globe [1]. Peer group is a group of people of same age or social status. They are fairly close friends and share the same activities. In general, peer groups or cliques have two to twelve members, with an average of five or six. It is the first social group outside the home in which the adolescent attempts to gain acceptance and recognition. Adolescents always emulate their mates in whatever form of behavior they exhibit, particularly that which interest them. Since socialization only refers to changes in behaviour, attitudes having their origin in interaction with other persons and those which occur through interaction, adolescents learn more through interaction with peers [2-3]. The school is an established academic institution in which the behaviour of an individual is sharpened to get him/her equipped for occupation socialization. In the school system the adolescent gets into the social group of "like minds" and interest. As a result of the various attitudes and skills, knowledge is acquired through role-play. Peer group as an agent of socialization is the most important socializing agent for the adolescents. Peer group is the pivot of social change and during interaction with peers, the adolescent's life is transformed from the helpless child into matured adult [4].

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Adolescence is a time of transformation in many areas of an individual's life. In the midst of these rapid physical, emotional, and social changes, youth begin to question standards and the need for parental guidance. It is also a time for individuals to make important decisions about their commitment to academics, family, and perhaps religion. As adolescents make the transition to middle school and then high school, peer networks increase, and peer crowd affiliation becomes an important aspect of peer relations. Also during adolescence, close friends begin to surpass parents as adolescents' primary source of social support and contribute in important ways to adolescents' self concept and wellbeing. Furthermore, dating relationships emerge and take on increasing importance [5].

At this phase of their lives, peers' advice tend to replace that of parents and friends play a significant role in their lives, this is why some of them have serious disagreement with their parents or guardians. Adolescents create a separate world for themselves using slangs, coded language, facial expression, body language which can only be understood by their peers. They also rely completely on peers' counsel and regard their parents as "old school" or "old fashioned" [6]. Peer groups are the most influential social forces affecting adolescent behaviour, from mundane decisions concerning clothing, hairstyle, music, and entertainment, to more significant decisions concerning short and long-term education plans. They are arguably even more important than parents, teachers and counselors during the formative adolescent years. However, studies from various cultures have shown that a child, 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 this play important role in the socialization of adolescents [7].

THE CONCEPT OF PEER GROUP

A peer group is an egalitarian group in which members share a common characteristic such as age or ethnicity. These attachments grow throughout childhood and adolescence. By the time students are in secondary school, they are likely to belong to some sort of student subculture. It is in the peer groups that the adolescent develops his ability to interact effectively in the society. Peer groups start in early adolescence with small, isolated, unisex cliques. The cliques are groups of boys and girls who live in the same neighborhood, go to the same school or neighborhood schools, belong to the same church, play the same games or have similar interests. A peer group consists of humans who share a similar or equal status and may be of the same age bracket. Interactions with Peers play a vital role in a child's social development. Peer groups may enhance or detract from the process of socialization that helps in acquiring knowledge, skills and behaviors needed to become productive members of the society [8]. Things considered as vital both for man's age, sex and social class are learnt through peer influence. The peer group is important during an adolescent stage since it gradually replaces the family as a primary source of need satisfaction. The child continues to depend on his family for the satisfaction of his basic physiological needs throughout most or all of the period before he leaves home to establish on his own [8]. Many of his psychological needs can be taken over more effectively through the peer group than through the family. The school serves as primary setting for the membership of peer groups, they may be in the same class, the same sex and close interaction as of equals, it is generally observed that peer group has a lot of influence on students. A student who is brilliant and surrounded by dull friends would lose interest in learning, on the other hand, a peer group with members who are inclined to study would have positive effect on a dull member towards learning and stimulate his/her interest on learning. The nature of a peer group determines the impact on the motivation and achievements of its members. 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 behavior but also on his motivation to work and achievement. The kind of person an adolescent is, dictates the type of group he/she is in, as peers tend to imitate each other. Peer groups appear to be as important in the lives of adult as in the lives of children and adolescents. Indeed, most adults belong to many peer groups, work groups, group of friends or relatives, social groups, athletic groups, and political groups. Having been accepted in each group, the individual derive the self-esteem, independence, confidence and affection he needs [8]. Imitation of behavior in a group occurs when a person acts in a way that is likely to be joined by the rest of the group, through observing and imitating the behavior of others, learners can by-pass much wasteful random behavior and come close to reproducing the behaviors of which members are recognized. A peer member may not be dull but playful, if he falls into a group of brilliant students who are not playful, he imitates them and this changes his attitude towards learning for better. This is why it is important for teachers to be able to distinguish a playful student from dull one. Students who are playful but have academic traits should be encouraged to join a study inclined group. There are students who may be dull in their primary school but became brilliant in secondary school because of peer group influence. Attention should be concentrated on students in their first three years of secondary education as This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

these are the most easily influenced by peer groups. Students at this level do not have a set goal until they get to higher level when they are faced with reality of senior school certificate examination (SSCE) and subsequent examinations [9]. Teachers are more likely to hold the attention of students in the Senior Secondary School (SSS) than students in Junior Secondary School (JSS). However, the teachers could use the peer group to get the needed responses in the JSS class. Effectiveness of the school depends on large measures on the development of effective small groups [9].

THE CONCEPT OF PEER GROUP INFLUENCE

This refers to the effect which Peer group members have on their fellow members. Mosha [5], is of the view that Peer influence can be both negative and positive. While we tend to think that peer influence leads teens to engage in unhealthy and unsafe behaviors, it can actually motivate youth to study harder in school, volunteer for community and social services, and participate in sports and other productive endeavors. Negative peer influences do exist. Negative peer influence leads an adolescent student to be involved in antisocial behaviour, hence, leading to the formation of negative peer group. Peer influence is not a simple process where youth are passive recipients of influence from others. Peers who become friends tend to already have a lot of things in common. Peers with similar interests, similar academic standing, and who enjoy doing the same things tend to gravitate towards each other. However, a student who associates with fellow peers who are not motivated in learning is negatively affected academically. Literature indicates that peers who are interested in academic issues are more likely to associate with students who have the same interest. They often study together, sharing course materials and information. Students who form positive peer group make more effort during learning, social activities, and also fear to engage in delinquent activities. The influence of the peer educational climate is defined by the amount and the style of help that children receive from the peer group, this is determined by elements of the peer context, like the dynamic of communication and effective relationships, attitude towards value, and expectations. Intelligent students do help their peers bring up their academic performances [5].

CONCEPT OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

This is the performance outcome that indicates the extent which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments specifically in school, college and university. Academic performance involves the ability of students to cope with their studies and with various tasks assigned to them by their instructors. Education has been perceived to be expensive and has been taking a significant portion of the nation's resources whether budgeted or an intervention. Parents and peer groups were observed to be significant in the social, psychological and educational development of the students. Contribution of parents have manifested not only on providing school needs but also providing financial and psychological support for students both at home and in the school [10]. When adolescent student that are positively motivated, do things in common during and after school hours, such students' academic performance would be positively affected. But if on the other hand, the group major value is negatively related to academics, the individual's performance could be low. Furthermore, while some students join peers that promote or pursue academic excellence, others join, interact with or promote peers from bad gangs or occult groups. Therefore the home as well as the school, has great role to play in promoting or checking peer group influence by including good programs in the school curriculum as well as the extracurricular activities of the school to checkmate bad peer group influences [10].

CONCEPT OF ADOLESCENCE

The word adolescence is Latin in origin, derived from the verb *adolescere*, which means "to grow into adulthood". Adolescence is a time of moving from the immaturity of childhood into the maturity of adulthood. Though there is no single event or boundary line that denotes the end of childhood or the beginning of adolescence yet experts think of the passage from childhood into and through adolescence as composed of a set of transitions. This transitional stage is between being a child and becoming an adult [11].

The transition is biological, cognitive, social and emotional which can be turbulent time for them. This period is sometimes referred to as teenage years, youth or puberty, occurring roughly between the ages of 10 and 20 years.

It can be broadly categorized into three stages:

1. **Early adolescents (10 to 14 years):** This is the phase when the kid is not yet matured but he is no longer a kid. At this stage, physical changes are a constant source of irritation.

Body changes: Puberty begins, rapid growth, secondary sex traits appear (like hair growth and breast development).

Thinking style: Focus remain mostly concrete, though early abstract reasoning starts to emerge.

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Social Shifts: Peer groups grow more important, independence from parents increases and they show more focus on privacy and body image [12].

2. **Middle adolescents (15 to 17 years):** This phase is marked by emotional and Cognitive mental maturity. Cognitive mental maturity develops early in girls than in boys.

Body changes: puberty physical changes continue or stabilize and adult height or physique approaches completion especially in boys.

Thinking style: abstract thinking skills expand, future goals take shape

Social shifts: develops romantic and sexual interest, highest peer pressure and conflict with Parents increases as autonomy is tested [12].

3. **Late adolescents (18 to 21 years):** Finally come close to adulthood to have a firm identity and more stable interests. Adolescents are more wary about security, safety and independence.

Body changes: complete physical maturation, full adult muscle mass and reproductive maturity.

Thinking style: advanced impulse control, future planning and solid moral reasoning.

Social shifts: increased emotional stability, peer group reduces and become more intimate and long-term career or life goals are prioritized [12].

Erik Erikson is a well-known and respected developmental psychologist, he is the first to coin the term “identity crisis” and who did a lot of work in the stages of human identity development. Two of Erikson’s eight stages of development pertain directly to the concept of adolescence. From the age of five until child reaches puberty, they are involved in a stage known as industry versus inferiority. During this time a child strives to gain status among their peers in order to come to terms with their personal strengths and weaknesses. Once this stage is completed, a child becomes more involved with social systems and peer groups. This leads into Erikson’s identity versus confusion, which occurs all through puberty and into early adulthood. This is the time in adolescence when attitudes about sex, love, marriage, gender roles, and other important life issues are formed and become part of the individual’s identity [12]. Identity versus role confusion is the most important component and event of adolescence, and is widely determined by varying cultural and social aspects. A defining characteristic of adolescents is the participation in high-risk activities in order to “rebel” against their parents’ wishes or expectations. This is not an entirely negative characteristic. Risk-taking adolescents may be independent thinkers, have high levels of energy and confidence, and feel ultimately in control of their lives. Unfortunately, a lot of the behaviors that adolescents pick up during mimesis that appear to be socially acceptable are high-risk behaviors that could become detrimental to the youth’s health and wellness. Again, this is especially true for adolescent immigrant girls who are highly acculturated. Families represent one of the most important developmental contexts for adolescents all over the world. However, there are marked culturally based differences in adolescents’ family experiences [12].

ADOLESCENTS’ PERIOD OF TRANSITION

Physical Transition:

The biological transition of adolescence, or Puberty, is perhaps the most observable sign that adolescence has begun, puberty is used as a collective term to refer to all the physical changes that occur in the growing boy or girl as he or she passes from childhood into adulthood. The timing of physical maturation varies widely. In the United States, menarche, typically occur around 12 years of age, although some youngsters start puberty when they are only 8 or 9 years of age and others when they are well into their teens. The duration of puberty also varies greatly, eighteen months to six years in girls and two to five years in boys. The physical changes of puberty are triggered by hormones, chemical substances in the body that act on specific organs and tissues. In boys a major change incurred during puberty is the increased production of testosterone, a male sex hormone, while girls experience increased production of the female hormone estrogen. Both in boys and girls a rise in growth hormone produces the adolescent growth spurt, the pronounced increase in height and weight that marks the first half of puberty [5].

Cognitive Transition:

A second element of the passage through adolescence is a cognitive transition. Compared to children, adolescents think in ways that are more advanced, more efficient and generally more complex. This is evident distinct areas of cognition.

First, during adolescence, individuals become better able than children to think about what is possible, instead of limiting their thought to what is real.

Second, during the passage into adolescence, individuals become better able to think about abstract ideas. For example, adolescents find it easier than children to comprehend the sorts of higher order, abstract logic inherent in

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puns, proverbs, metaphors and analogies. The adolescents' have increased facility and interest in thinking about interpersonal relationship, politics, philosophy, religion and morality-topics that involve such abstract concepts as friendship, faith, democracy, fairness and honesty.

Third, during adolescence, individuals often think about the process of thinking itself or meta cognition, as a result, adolescents may display increased introspection and self-consciousness. Though Improvements in meta cognitive abilities provide important intellectual advantages, one potentially negative by- product of these advances is the tendency for adolescents to develop a sort of egocentrism, or intense preoccupation with the self. Psychologists refer to this as the imaginary audience.

Fourth change in cognition is that thinking tends to become multidimensional, rather than limited to a single issue. They now understand that peoples' personalities are not one-sided, or that social situations can have different interpretations, depending on one's point of view, and this permits the adolescents to have far more sophisticated and complicated relationship with other people.

Finally, adolescents are more likely than children to see things as relative, rather than absolute. They are more likely to question other's assertion and less likely to accept "facts" as absolute truths. This increase in relativism can be particularly exasperating to parents, who may feel that their adolescent's children question everything just for the sake of argument (Hashmi,2018).

Emotional transition:

Adolescence is also a period of emotional transition, marked by changes in the way individuals view themselves and, in their capacity, to function independently. As individuals' self-conceptions become more abstract and as they become more able to see themselves in psychological terms, they become more interested in understanding their own personalities and why they behave the way they do. For most adolescents, establishing sense of autonomy, or independence, is an important part of the emotional transition out of childhood as it helps in establishing a sense of identity. During adolescence, there is a movement away from the dependency- typical of childhood, toward the autonomy- typical of adulthood. For example, older adolescents do not generally rush to their parents whenever they are upset, worried or in need of assistance. They do not see their parents as all-knowing or all-powerful, and often have a great deal of emotional energy wrapped up in relationships outside the family. In addition, older adolescents are able to see and interact with their parents as people, not just as their parents. Many parents wonder about the susceptibility of adolescents to peer pressure. Specifically, adolescents are more likely to conform to their peer's opinions when it comes to short-term, day-to-day, and social matters, examples: styles of dress and tastes in music, in the early years of high school. When it comes to long term questions concerning educational or occupational plans, values, religious belief, and ethical issues, teenagers are influenced in a major way by their parents. In general, during childhood, boys and girls are highly oriented toward their parents and less toward their peers. Peer pressure during the early elementary school years is not strong. During early adolescence, conformity to parents continues to decline and conformity to peers and peer pressure continue to rise. It is not until middle adolescence that genuine behavioral independence emerges, when conformity to parents as well as peers declines [5].

Social Transition:

Accompanying the biological, cognitive and emotional transitions of adolescence are important changes in the adolescent's social relationships. One of the most noteworthy aspects of the social transition into adolescence is the increase in the amount of time individuals spend with their peers. Although relations with age-mates exist well before adolescence, during the teenage years they change in significance and structure. For example, there is a sharp increase during adolescence in the amount of time individuals spend with their peers than that they spend with their parents or adults. During adolescence, peer group function much more often without adult supervision than they do during childhood, and more often involve friends of the opposite sex. Finally, whereas children's peer relationships are mainly to pairs of friends and relatively small groups-three or four children at a time, adolescence mark the emergence of larger groups of peers, or crowds. Crowds are large collectives of similarly stereotyped individuals who may or may not spend much time together. In contrast to cliques, crowds are not settings for adolescents' intimate interactions or friendship, but instead to locate the adolescent (to himself and to others), within the social structure of the school. The crowds themselves tend to form a sort of social hierarchy or map of the school, and different crowds are seen as having different degrees of status or importance. The importance of peers during early adolescence coincides with changes in individuals' needs for intimacy. As children begin to share secrets with their friends, loyalty and commitment develop. During adolescence, the search for intimacy intensifies, and self-disclosure between best friends takes place. Teenagers, especially girls, spend a good deal of time discussing their innermost thoughts and feelings, trying to understand one another. The discovery that they tend to think and feel the same as someone else becomes another important basis of friendship [5].

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DIFFERENT PEER GROUP INFLUENCES

Indisputably the youths of any country are a great force to reckon with if their development is of great priority to the government. If individuals who are virile and energetic are well channeled, there will be tremendous transformation and such a nation will develop optimally. When such energies are dissipated on activities that are inimical to national development, such a country will certainly witness serious problems [6]. The kind of group an adolescent identifies with will sometimes determine the kind of influence the group will have on his academic achievement. Children if not checked often associate with bad friends and this could have a great negative impact on them. During the period of adolescence, the amount of influence that peer group has on one's academic achievement could be enormous. Peer influence can have both positive and negative effects on an adolescent's academic performance. The peer group is a source of affection, sympathy, understanding, and a place for experimentation [4]. Before talking about peer influences, it will be better to consider Peer pressure which is a contributory factor to Peer Influences.

Peer pressure:

The term “**pressure**” implies the process that influence people to do something that they might not otherwise choose to do [7]. Peer pressure refers to the influences that peers can have on each other. Peer pressure is an emotional or mental force from people belonging to the same social group (such as age, grade or status) to act or behave in a manner similar to themselves [7]. Peer pressure is also defined as the ability of people from the same social rank or age to influence another of same age bracket. Peer pressure is usually associated with teens although its influence is not confined to teenagers alone, matured adults, teens, young adults and children can be seen doing things in order to be accepted by their peers. Peer pressure is commonly associated with episodes of adolescent risk taking (such as delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse, sexual behaviours), because these behaviours commonly occur in the company of peers. They can encourage each other to skip classes, steal, cheat, use illegal drugs, alcoholic drinks or become involved in other risky behaviours. Majority of adolescents with substance abuse problems began using drugs or alcohol as a result of peer pressure. Negative peer pressure may influence in various ways like joining group who are involved in the above mentioned bad behaviours, smoking cigarette and Indian hemp among others. It may also lead to the decision to have a boyfriend/girlfriend. Peer pressure forces youths into loitering about in the streets, watching films and attending parties during school hours, taping as alternative to stealing which may eventually graduate into armed robbery [7]. However, it can also have positive effects when youths are pressured by the peer towards positive behaviours, such as volunteering for charity or excelling in academics, It also helps to motivate one to do his best and boost his academic performance examples: forming reading group, going to the library, anxious to join others in answering questions in the classroom [7].

Peer pressure may also result in one doing things that may not fit with one's sense of what is right or wrong. In other words, when peer pressure makes one do things that people frown at, it is a negative peer pressure. Operationally peer pressure is a force exerted by people that are influenced by ideas, values and behavior either positively or negatively and always associate with adolescents [7]. Acceptance by a peer group improves social relationships. This has beneficial effect on individual learning insecurity that arises from satisfying emotional tension, and 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 his teacher [7]. Peer pressure is something that causes conflict in an individual's life. The feeling of not fitting in, not being good enough, and not being a part of the “group” overwhelms and takes over the mindset of a regular student. High stress and hurtful experiences seem to always be the result to give in to Peer pressure because of the endless amount of negative aspects that can come with it [7]. Peer pressure often seems to have various effects towards the student's academic performance in school. Positive pressure brings good effects while negative pressure brings bad effects. Teenagers need to seek comfort from others which they found in the presence of their peers, and they are not even aware on how their peers influence them academically [13].

Positive Peer Influences:

A Peer influence could be termed positive if it creates an acceptable impact in the life of the Peer members. Positive peer pressure results in a person feeling better, healthier or happier [14].

a. Peer Acceptance:

Acceptance by a peer group improve social relations, these have beneficial effects on individual learning insecurity that arises from satisfying emotional tension, and enables him to concentrate more on his assigned learning tasks. This indicates that acceptance by the group 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

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within his peer group. Where he is wrong, he prefers to be corrected by a member of his peer group than his teacher [15].

b. Positive Peer Motivation:

Student's motivation refers to a student's willingness, need, desire and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in the learning process. Maintaining high motivation affects psychological and social functioning, and facilitates academic performance and positive perception of the school. The perception of peer support is positively related with school outcomes and adjustment. Motivation and engagement are critical for adolescent readers, if students are not motivated to read, they will simply not benefit from reading instruction". Adolescents will take on the task of learning better only if they have sufficient compelling reasons for doing so. When students feel that they are cared for and treated with respect by their teachers and peers, they are more likely to develop greater confidence in their academic abilities [15].

c. Friendship, Unity and Collective Behaviour :

Friendship refers to a close, mutual and voluntary relationship. Friends have been described most often with respect to their qualities and functions. It has been shown that having friends promotes individuals' well-being and academic success. Friendship interactions are particularly important with regard to social integration because adolescents are more likely to stay in school when they feel comfortable and connected to other adolescents with similar interests and aspirations. This phenomenon of similarity among friends is known as homophile and is seen on a variety of characteristics, including academic characteristics. In addition, studies have reported that having a good friend or companion who appreciates your academic achievements, serves as a positive factor to achieve motivation. They also tend to be engaged in and even excel at academic tasks more than those who have peer relationship problems. In this regard, the selection of friendship serves as a purpose to achieve academic development. By choosing to associate with particular peers, adolescents select a social context which exposes them to a particular set of values, behaviours, and opportunities. Whether or not students select friends with similar academic goals, they may become more similar over time via socialization. Peers are "the single most potent source of influence," affecting virtually every aspect of development cognitive, affective, psychological, and behavioral aspects of development. Student's interaction with friends can positively influence overall academic development, knowledge acquisition, analytical and problem-solving skills, and self-esteem [15].

d. Socialization:

Peer groups enhance the process of socialization that helps in acquiring knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to become productive members of the society. Things considered as vital both for man's age, sex and social class are learnt through peer influence. Peer groups appear to be as important in the lives of adult as in the lives of children and adolescents. Indeed, most adults belong to many peer groups, work groups, group of friends or relatives, social groups, athletic groups, political groups and others. Having been accepted in each group, the individual derive the self-esteem, independence, confidence and affection he needs [8]. Peer groups serve as an avenue for teaching members gender roles. Through gender role socialization, group members learn about sex differences, social and cultural expectations. The group can comprise all males, all females or both male and female. Adolescent peer groups provide support for children and teens as they assimilate into the adult society decreasing dependence on parents and increasing self sufficiency. By this period individuals expand their perspectives beyond the family and develop cordial relationship with others in the social system. Peers serve as social referents. Peer groups provide an influential social setting in which group norms are developed and enforced through socialization processes that promote within-group similarity. Within the group, cohesion is determined and maintained by such factors as group communication, group consensus and group conformity concerning attitude and behaviour. As members of the group interconnect and agree, a normative code arises. If a member deviates from the strict normative code, it can lead to the member's rejection from the group [8].

e. Academic Performance:

It is believed that intelligent students do help their peers bring up their academic performance, all attributable to the fact that they share a common team of similar aspiration [1].

Peers who are interested in academic activities are more likely to associate with students who have the same view because they usually study together, share course materials, and information. It has been noted that peers with positive influence study hard, engage in positive activities and try as much as possible to desist from bad gang behaviours like smoking, stealing, truancy, bullying and examination malpractice [16].

Negative Peer Influences:

Negative Peer influences occur as a result of negative Peer pressure and this can be so destructive to the individual and results in people feeling unhappy, unwell or uncomfortable [14]. It is no longer news that many adolescents are engaged in antisocial behaviours as a result of Peer pressure which are manifested in the form of rape, sexual promiscuity, disobedience to constituted authority, examination malpractice, repeated exposure to violent media, This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

forgery, abortion, truancy, stealing, robbery, kidnapping and riots. Anti-social acts or deviant behaviour among adolescents are behaviours that are contrary to socially accepted moral behaviour and that these include cheating in examination, vandalism, drug abuse, smoking, aggression, bullying and lateness to school [8]. Peer pressure is commonly associated with episodes of adolescent risk taking (such as delinquency, drug abuse, sexual behaviours), because these behaviours commonly occur in the company of peers. They can encourage each other to skip classes, steal, cheat, use illegal drugs or alcohol, or become involved in other risky behaviours. Majority of adolescents with substance abuse problems began using drug or alcohol as a result of peer pressure. Negative peer pressure may influence in various ways like joining group who drink alcohol, smoke cigarette and Indian hemp among others. It may also lead to the decision to have a boyfriend/girlfriend. Peer pressure indulges youth into loitering about in the streets, watching films and attending parties during school hours, tapping as alternative to stealing which may eventually graduate into armed robbery [7]. Some of the negative peer influences are:

1. Drug and Substance Abuse:

According to the World Health organization, substance abuse is defined as the harmful use of psycho-active substances, and their repeated use can lead to dependence. The negative consequences of illicit drug use include behavioral, cognitive and physiological disorders [17]. Adolescence is a critical phase of human development, and it is characterized by the tendency to adopt risk behaviours, such as the use of illicit drugs. When illicit drug use is initiated early, the period in which such use continues tend to be longer, thereby increasing the chances of developing dependence [17]. The pressure to fit in can get Peers into big trouble when it comes to drugs and alcohol. Not only are they illegal, they are bad for them. Both can have serious long-term effects. Having parties with alcohol are common in high school. Some students like to drink because they think it's cool. The prevalence of smoking increases dramatically during adolescence. Drugs and alcohol impairs ones judgment, causing one to do things he or she normally would not do. It can cause physical, social, and psychological harm. Use of some drugs may also lead to criminal penalties, although these vary widely depending on the local jurisdiction. Substances most often associated with this term include: alcohol, amphetamines, barbiturates, benzodiazepines, cannabis, cocaine, hallucinogens and Opioids [14].

2. Gang Formation:

A gang is a group of persons, usually youths, who share a common identity and engage in criminal behaviour. In recent time, gang behaviour has become a major challenge among adolescents, and it has gone beyond ordinary youthful exuberance to committing heinous crimes. In most cases, some gangs associate themselves with a particular geographic area or type of crime, and some use graffiti as a form of nonverbal communication. Members of the gangs typically share common social, cultural, and psychological characteristics.

Gang behaviour jeopardizes students' chances of achieving their educational goals

Meanwhile, studies have examined factors associated with gang and anti-social behaviours among secondary school students. These behaviours include indiscipline, bullying, truancy, drug abuse, and smoking among others [16].

3. Exposure to Violent Media:

Peer exposure to violent media increases aggression. Negative effect from playing video games and watching violent movies is always very overwhelming for adolescents and can lead to irrational behaviors. Most Peer reported aggressive behaviours are due to exposure to violent television shows and video games. Repeated exposure to violent media is responsible for aggressive thoughts and actions thus increasing the likelihood that the individual would behave in an unlikely manner especially when frustrated or provoked [18].

4. Bullying:

Bullying is a subtype of aggressive behaviour, in which an individual or a group of individuals repeatedly attack, humiliate or exclude a relatively powerless person. It is characterized by repeated act of aggression perpetrated by one or more individuals against a victim who has difficulties or is unable to defend himself or herself. Peers usually involve in bullying in school and this is a huge problem that exists among adolescents. It comprises of verbal attacks (name calling, threats), physical attacks (hitting, kicking, damaging victim's property), and social aggression (social exclusion, rumour spreading), up to the most recent forms of attacks through Internet and new technologies, referred to as cyber bullying [19]. The act of bullying is intentional and usually occurs as a result of someone insulting a member of their Peer or their Peer member refusing to agree to their norms – Peer abuse. Bullying is a problem that affects millions of students of all races and classes. Bullying causes everyone to be worried, not only the student on the receiving end, but parents, teachers, and other adults. Certain types of bullying occur more frequently than others. Making fun of other students is usually the most common form of bullying, while the incidents of physical bullying and cyber bullying are at peak among middle-school students but declines with students age. Verbal and social bullying occur among upper secondary students. Physical bullying is probably the most obvious kind of violence in schools, and educators tend to perceive physical bullying as more serious than other types of bullying. Studies showed that people who are abused by their peers are at risk for mental health problems, This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

such as low self-esteem, stress, depression, or anxiety. They may also think more about suicide. Bullies always get involved in problems. It is violence, and often leads to more violent behavior as the bully grows. It is estimated that 1 out of 4 elementary-school bullies will have a criminal record by the time they are 30. Some Peer bullies end up being rejected by their peers and lose friendships as they grow older. Bullies may also experience poor performance in school and may not enjoy successful relationship like others. Some bullies actually have personality disorders that don't allow them to understand normal social emotions like guilt, empathy, compassion or remorse. Such teens need help from a mental health professional like a psychiatrist or psychologist [19].

5. Poor Academic Performance:

All the above negative Peer influences (drug and substance abuse, gang formation, violent media exposure and bullying) result in poor academic performances which manifests in form of, lack of interest in academic work, poor school performances, absenteeism, examination malpractices and lack of respect to school authority, which can finally lead to suspension or expulsion from school.

EFFECT OF PEER INFLUENCES ON ADOLESCENTS ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AS A PRESENT DAY CHALLENGE

Considering the fact that the present day challenge is mainly as a result of negative Peer influences on the academic performance of students, we will concentrate on these negative influences.

Alcohol and drug Abuse:

As Peers get involved in alcohol and drug abuse, their academic performance will be negatively affected. Studies have pointed to an association between drug use and antisocial behaviour, which can be described as disrespectful behaviour and violation of rights [20]. Both prohibited drugs (hallucinogens, cannabis/marijuana/hashish, cocaine, heroin, methadone, and amphetamine) and legal drugs (caffeine, tobacco, ethanol/alcohol and opioids), has negative effects that are very severe, and damaging to internal organs and the individual's behaviour thereby affecting the individual's social life [21]. Alcohol abuse is a maladaptive pattern of drinking, leading to clinically significant impairment or distress.

Recurrent use of alcohol results in failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home example, repeated absence or poor work performance can lead to suspensions, or expulsions from school and it is as well linked with suicide [20]. The use of illicit drugs especially **Crystal Methamphetamine** has posed a lot of challenges in our society today due to its harmful effects to our youths.

Crystal methamphetamine is the most widely used synthetic addictive drug globally. It is a highly addictive synthetic psycho-stimulant that increases energy and feelings of euphoria, among other physiological effects. Peers normally see it as a drug of choice because it is easily accessible, affordable and gives them desired effect. Its trade name is: **Desoxyyn**, Street names are: **Meth, Speed, Crystal, Glass, Ice, Crank, Tina, Yaba, Jib, Sketch, Biker's Coffee, Tweak, Shards, Stove top, Chalk, Shabu and Tik** due to the ticking sound produced when smoked, while the Local name is: **Mkpurummiri**. The prevalence of crystal methamphetamine use is highest in our society today. It is perceived as the fastest growing addictive substance ever introduced into the market, and at some points has even exceeded other addictive drugs [22]. The challenge with substance abuse is that a high percentage of adolescents experiment with illegal mood altering drugs at a young age and with highly addictive drugs such as crystal methamphetamine. A few studies have also indicated that 12 to 19 year old adolescents react severely to crystal methamphetamine as it is a highly addictive drug. The problem is not merely that it is so readily available, but also a drug of choice for young people [22]. Crystal Meth use is regarded as a phenomenon that affects not only the individual but the community as a whole, as its use commonly results in the disintegration of family structures, where, in many cases, individuals drop out of schools and even end up dying by suicide. There is a great plight among parents who are striving to combat this drug that is destroying their children's life. Currently, most of the communities and parents of these drug users have initiated strategies to fight the extensive abuse of crystal methamphetamine. Some communities create campaign to deal with this social dilemma. However in many instances, parents who seek help for their children with extensive crystal methamphetamine use are consequently exposed to various psychological problems themselves. Another gloomy phenomenon associated with crystal methamphetamine use is that it even attracts individuals who have never experimented with drugs before [22]. Methamphetamine use has also been shown to be associated with childhood sexual abuse and HIV sexual risk behaviours including commercialization of sex and having unprotected sex with multiple sexual partners. It poses a big challenge as these Peer drug users find it very difficult to concentrate in their academic works which results in their dropping out of school or even having psychiatric issues [22].

Gang Formation:

Peer gang formation is one of the challenges our society is facing today as a result of the havoc gang are causing both in armed robbery and other anti-social behaviours. They share a common identity and engage in criminal

behaviour. This Peer gangs do things together or hang out together, they band together for social, cultural, or other reasons and intentionally plan and commit anti social or illegal acts. In most cases, some gangs associate themselves with a particular geographic area or type of crime, and some use graffiti as a form of nonverbal communication. Members of the gangs typically share common social, cultural, and psychological characteristics. Most students who join gangs do so because of protection, enjoyment, respect, money, or because a friend is in a gang [16].

Gang has become a place for youth violence and which is an occurring thing in Nigeria. School is a natural social setting for adolescents and it is also the place where the behaviours of adolescents are influenced and manipulated. Basically, gang behaviour has become a huge threat to the social security of the country. It does not only affect the students, but also the school and ultimately the community. Gang behaviour jeopardizes students' chances of achieving their educational goals because of distractions from academic works. Gang formation is associated with various psychosocial factors such as parental control, school interest, motivation, self concept, gender, school environment, spiritual intelligence, emotional intelligence, creativity and goal setting. It leads to the formation of some anti-social behaviours which include: indiscipline, bullying, truancy, drug abuse, and smoking and this is why it is a big challenge to the society [16].

Negative Influence of Social Media:

Most Peer reported aggressive behaviours are due to exposure to violent television shows and video games. Repeated exposure to violent media is responsible for aggressive thoughts and actions thus increasing the likelihood that the individual would behave in an unlikely manner especially when frustrated or provoked [18]. Teenagers these days widely use social networks (sites), they have made this a part of their daily activities. Every webpage that allows for social interaction is considered to be a social media site. The social network pages include: Face book, Twitter, Tik Tok, Instagram, Gaming site, YouTube and others which offer the youths a portal for entertainment and communication. Though it could be of importance in building social relationship and sharing information and knowledge related to their needs and activities in real life, provide supportive environment and serves as an avenue to share knowledge and experience, assessment of health information and enhances learning opportunities, but most times it affects the Peers negatively in the following ways:

- A. Cyber bullying and online harassment (which can lead to the individual being psychologically affected thereby causing poor academic performance.
- B. Online sexual advances and harassment (sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit messages, photographs or images via cell phones, computer or other digital devices). This can cause academic distraction leading to poor school performance .
- C. Face book depression; Depression is characterized by extreme feelings of hopelessness, sadness, isolation, worry, withdrawal and worthlessness. Face book depression occur when these Peers spend much of their time in social media sites example Facebook and begin to exhibit signs of depression and other psychological problems which can lead to more health issues. The above negative Peer influences are considered as being a big challenge in academic performances of adolescents [18].

SUGGESTION ON PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF NEGATIVE INFLUENCES OF PEER GROUP IN OUR SOCIETY

- i. It is not an easy task to try to mitigate on negative peer pressures. That notwithstanding, teachers have to put in their best to achieve it. This involves drawing a fine line between taking an authoritarian role and mellowing down sometimes to allow individual freedom. Teachers can increase their personal awareness of adolescents' social systems by putting more energy in getting to know their students and the groups to which they belong. In the schools, academic excellence in areas outside the core curriculum should be recognized. For instance outstanding performances in school debates, leadership (Students' Union Government-SUG), Arts exhibition and other Co-Curricular activities should be highlighted and encouraged. Harnessing the power of peers can be important to create a school supportive of academic excellence [8].
- ii. Adults and families would play some role in mitigating peer pressures by abandoning the idea that peer groups are always thinking negative. They could achieve this by promoting positive peer relations. This will necessitate the need for professional counselors to set up parent's education programs. For families with teenagers, this will target poor social skills and aggressive tendencies of teenagers and help them to adjust positively. The positive adjustment could be achieved by guidance counselors using behaviour modification therapies. Also, appropriate ways of communication, dealing with anger, raising self esteem could be part of the curriculum content in such programs [8].

- iii. Parents can still help in reducing negative peer pressures by cultivating in their teens self confidence for them to avoid being at risk of imbibing such undesired peer influences. For instance, teens can be praised for smart choices they have made and also compliment adolescents' accomplishments. Parents should know their child's friends and occasionally invite them to their home. Activities to include teens they approve on could be organized on behalf of their own teens. Such activities may include after school clubs, church programs, boys' brigade and girls' guide meetings. If parents find out that their teen is engaging in unacceptable behaviour with other friends, such parents should not hesitate in addressing the issue to make their expectations of the adolescent clear. Parents could liaise with school counselors if possible to address the problem as early as it starts. For instance, the quality time spent together with these adolescents has a very high added value. If parents have a busy schedule such that they cannot be physically present always, they could still make their presence felt in the home through phone calls, personal notes or other forms of communication. It is most worthy to remind parents of adolescents to be tolerant, patience, caring and showing unconditional love can never be over emphasized. Also, they should realize that adolescence is not terminal. The Parents guide, rather than directly control the adolescents' actions. Adolescents who feel warmth and support from their parents are less likely to engage in risky or delinquent behaviors. Parents who convey clear expectations regarding their adolescents' behavior and who demonstrate consistent limit setting and monitoring are less likely to have adolescents who engage in risky behaviors. Authoritative parenting, as opposed to harsh or permissive parenting, is most likely to promote mature behaviors [8].
- iv. Spiritual doctrines (like being an active member of a prayer ministry or organization) can as well help some drug and alcohol addicts.
- v. Peers form the cushion of support during the fragile time that identity is being formed. Peer group help to form their identity by providing boundaries that enable them to internalize the values that form their character to foster their learning and act accordingly without generating retribution from authority or rejection from their peers. 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 or positively. 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, some prefer to be corrected by members of their peer group than teachers or parents when they are wrong.
- vi. Another factor, which has been identified as a possible factor of decreasing peer influence is assertive refusal. Adolescents that are able to maintain an assertive refusal are less susceptible to the group's influence [15].

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 his or her learning. Thus, a dull student may become study inclined when he finds himself in a group that encourages effective learning. Adolescence is a stage of friendship formation. Peer influence is very glaring among the adolescents and they could be affected positively or negatively. The most challenging aspect of these peer influences in our society today are the negative peer influences which include; Alcohol and Drug abuse, Gang formation, negative social media influence and bullying. The trending aspect of these influences is Drug abuse. The Drug they mostly abuse that is causing a big challenge in our society today is Crystal Meth. Peer pressure is one of the factors that causes the abuse of this drug, and to prevent or control Crystal Meth abuse, as well as other negative Peer influences from affecting the academic performances of these peers, all hands should be on deck to enable families, churches and schools to become fully involved in raising healthy and well-adjusted young adults.

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