

PEER GROUP PRESSURE AND BULLYING AS CORRELATES OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF IN-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN ABIA STATE: THE MODERATING INFLUENCE OF GENDER

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Abstract

Peer group pressure has been a major problem among in-school adolescents. This study examined peer group pressure and bullying as correlates of academic achievement of in-school adolescents in Abia State: The moderating influence of gender. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were used for the study. The design was correlation survey. A multistage sampling technique was employed in drawing a sample of 400 JSS3 students. A questionnaire instrument of three clusters was used in data collection. Data collected were analyzed using linear regression analysis (correlation) and ANOVA F-statistic. The result showed that there exists a significant relationship between peer group pressure and academic achievement of in-school adolescents. Also, there exists a significant relationship between bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents. It was recommended, among others, that in-school adolescents should learn different ways of dealing with peer group pressure in school in order to enhance their achievement and parents should also work in collaboration with school authorities through PTA in order to curb incidence of bullying among students and also promote their achievement.

Keywords: Peer group pressure, bullying, academic achievement, in-school adolescents,

Introduction

Childhood stage is a very smooth and hitch-free transition because the parents and other care givers have it as their primary responsibility to provide necessary protection, care and guidance to their children or wards. However, at the end of childhood stage comes the adolescence stage, which is associated with hormonal changes, physical, biological and many forms of development coming up at the same time which are challenging and embarrassing if adolescents are not properly informed about such challenges or changes.

Several challenges that adolescents face if not properly resolved may affect their future adjustment in adulthood. Adolescents, according to World Health Organization [WHO] (2010) refers to young people who are in-between childhood and adulthood and are undergoing physical, mental, social and emotional changes accompanied by an increasing definition of sexual identity and social status. Iroanusi (2018) defined adolescents as individuals who are in the bridge between their life as children and life as adults which gives them the opportunity to start dropping childhood behaviours and start learning adults' life style. Most of them are in secondary schools.

In-school adolescents typically refer to individuals undergoing the period of transition from childhood to adulthood or adolescence, who are actually schooling. In-school adolescents as opined by Ede (2013) are students within the age of adolescent who are still in secondary school. In the same way, Ozioko (2013) perceives in-school adolescents as students who have reached puberty but are yet to be adult who are still going to school. Adolescents are mostly found at the secondary schools which this study focuses on.

The secondary schools provide an atmosphere for personality development and social adjustments among adolescents, and expose them to career aspirations and job expectations. These expectations inspire them to hard work which influences their academic achievement. Academic achievement refers to the scholastic standing of a student at any given moment which could be explained in terms of the grades obtained in school subject(s) (Iketaku, Offiong, Udo & Ikot, 2014). To Adeyemo (2011), academic achievement means grades a student makes in school. The school may have other aims and objectives but the main emphasis is on achievement of sound scholarship. Adeyemo further explained that the major aim of the school is to work towards helping students attain academic excellence. Moreover, virtually all the stakeholders in the education sector lay much emphasis on academic achievements of students. Iroanusi (2018) perceived academic achievement as scores, grade(s) or a measure of learning outcome of in-school adolescents over time.

As a measure of learning outcomes or grades obtained by students, there is a poor trend in the academic achievement of secondary school students in Nigeria generally. Evidence from the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) Chief Examiner's reports of the overall students' performance in the examination for the year 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 was not encouraging.

Ohafia Education Zone of Abia State in particular is not left out of this dismal trend of poor academic achievement of students at the junior secondary school level. Evidence obtained from the Secondary Education Management Board (SEMB), Ohafia Education Zone shows that students' performance in Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination (JSSCE) was very poor for three consecutive years [Planning Research and Statistics Department (PRSD, 2017)]. This dismal performance therefore calls for urgent attention on factors that could be responsible for such performance at the junior secondary school level since consistently poor academic achievement may likely affect the future academic success of the students. However, the poor trend in school achievement among many secondary school students in the Zone could be blamed on or related to a variety of factors such as peer group pressure and bullying among others.

Peer comes from a Latin word 'par' which means equal. A peer is somebody of equal standing with others in terms of age or social class. Peer group pressure is the influence exerted by a peer group in encouraging a person to change their attitude, values in order to conform to group norms (Korir & Kipkemboi, 2014). Peer group pressure is also viewed by Weinfield (2010) as emotional or mental forces from people belonging to the same social group with respect to age or status to act or behave in a manner similar to them. That is to say, peer group pressure influences members' attitudes to meet or fit into the expectations of others. Iroanusi (2018) defined peer group pressure as the influence or force exerted by adolescents belonging to the same age bracket or social group, which can affect their individual actions, ideas, values and behaviour, thereby affecting their academic achievement either positively or negatively.

Several studies have been conducted to explain the influence of peer group pressure on achievement. Carman and Zhang (2008) in their study indicated that the adolescents who have a high level of conformity to unconventional peer behaviour tend to have lower GPA than those who have lower level of conformity. Omotere (2011) reported that peer group pressure could influence the academic performance of in-school adolescents positively or negatively. According to Omotere peers can mobilize one another's energy and motivation towards academic success when they act as positive role models. This implies that when peers indulge in positive academic activities like studying together, they are more likely to enhance their academic achievement and vice versa. The author however stated that peer group pressure can also have a negative influence, when they encourage each other to skip classes, steal, cheat, use drugs or alcohol, or become involve in other risky behaviours. Also, Arief (2011) asserts that peer group pressure propels students into loitering about in the streets, watching films and

attending parties during school hours, and also tapping as alternative to stealing which may eventually graduate into armed robbery. These may likely affect the lives of such students negatively, especially their academic achievement. This may be the case in Ohafia Education Zone though it is not yet justified with empirical evidence which this study set to provide.

With the conflicting opinions and results of previous studies involving the influence of peer group pressure and since this may affect adolescents in different ways, it becomes a serious issue that needs to be addressed. Moreover, given the fact that students spend twice as much time with peers as compared to parents or other adults is enough reason to study how much the pressures that peers place on each other influence their academic achievement (Korir & Kipkemboi, 2014). The concern of this work is therefore to determine the extent to which peer group pressure correlate with students' academic achievement.

Apart from peer group pressure which appears to correlate with students' academic achievement, bullying is another variable that may also correlate students' achievement in school. Darmawan (2010) defines bullying as a form of aggression in which a person repeatedly harasses another person physically and or psychologically. Ponzo (2013) describes bullying as when a student is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. Ponzo further asserted that these negative actions include attacking or discomforting the student physically or verbally, spreading rumors, and intentionally excluding the student from group activities. Iroanusi (2018) defined bullying as consistent emotional and physical attacks on younger in-school adolescents by older ones either in school or outside school which may affect their academic achievement.

Bullying may have influence on adolescents' behaviour including their academic achievement. According to Raskauskas and Modell (2011), bullying can have an overwhelming impact on students' performance, emotional health and wellbeing, and ability to reach their true potential. Victims of bullying are more likely to report feeling unhappy and lonely at school, and having fewer good friends (Brank, Hoetger & Hazen, 2012). Also, Jan and Husain (2015) mentioned that bullying includes verbal and physical assaults, threats, jokes or mockery and criticizing, insulting behaviour and disgusting facial expressions. It also involves the use of force, threat or coercion to abuse, intimidate or aggressively dominate others and this behaviour is often habitual. These are common in the secondary school where senior students bully the junior ones or stronger students bully the weaker ones thereby impeding their learning. In Ohafia Education Zone, the researcher observed that older students are always seen beating the younger ones in the class and within the school premises, while many others engage in fighting especially on their way home after school and this may affect their academic achievement.

Few studies indicate that bullying has effect on academic performance, which calls for more research effort to substantiate their findings. Ouellet-Morin (2011) found that bullying is highly correlated with depression, school avoidance or poor school attendance. This may in turn affect academic achievement negatively. Barrett, Jennings and Lynch (2012) revealed that the fear of being bullied in school can make a student more willing to skip class and less aspired to pursue higher grades in school. They basically strive for social acceptance among peers and may be willing to engage in behaviours that will allow them to be accepted otherwise they may be bullied by others. This could in turn be related to lower academic achievement. Hence, it becomes necessary for researchers to ascertain the relationship between bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents in order to provide empirical evidence to this regard. The influence of bullying may vary among male and female students.

Gender differences have become a recurrent issue in literature. Nzewi (2010) defines gender as a psychological term used in describing behaviours and attributes expected of individuals on the basis of being born as either male or female. According to Yang (2010), gender can be viewed as social attributes and opportunities associated with being a male and a

female and the relationships between women and men, girls and boys. This implies that gender differences are defined by the society based on its norms and values. Iroanusi (2018) define gender simply as male and female.

Studies have shown that gender differences exist in students' academic achievement. As observed by Mlambo (2011), gender differences do exist in students' academic performance depending on the subject matter. Researchers (Abdu-Raheem, 2012 & Igbo & Ihejiene, 2014) considered gender as a reasonable determinant or predictor of students' academic achievement. But, whether gender in relation to peer group pressure and bullying may have positive or negative influence on the academic achievement of in-school adolescents is yet to be made clear to the researcher. Notwithstanding, Young, Morales McCabe, Boyd & D'Arcy (2009) stated that females are more susceptible to by peer group pressures than males. Whereas, Ponzio (2013) argues that male adolescents are more predisposed to peer group pressure and even bullying than their female counterparts. Though, literature on gender specific effects of bullying on academic achievement appears to be scanty and yet to provide enough evidence to justify the claim, it is therefore necessary to ascertain the moderating influence of gender in the correlation between peer group pressure, bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents to provide relevant empirical evidence on the topic.

It suffices to state that, the influence of peer group pressure and bullying on individuals' behaviour generally cannot be underestimated. Many researchers have asserted that peer group pressure, especially in school settings could be a powerful force for both pro-social and anti-social behaviour such as bullying among in-school adolescents. However, in Ohafia education Zone of Abia State, in the course of review of literature, it appears there is no literature or empirical evidence known to the researcher to show the correlation between peer group, bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents' in the area. Hence, investigating peer group pressure and bullying as correlates of academic achievement of in-school adolescents becomes an important topic to explore.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to examine peer group pressure and bullying as correlates of academic achievement of in-school adolescents in Abia State. Thus, specifically, the study examined:

1. The relationship between peer group pressure and academic achievement of in-school adolescents?
2. The relationship between bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents?

Research Questions

The following questions were posed to guide the study.

3. What is the relationship between peer group pressure and academic achievement of in-school adolescents?
4. What is the relationship between bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents?

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between peer group pressure and academic achievement of in-school adolescents.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents.

Methodology

This study employed a correlation survey research design. According to Nworgu (2015), correlational survey research design seeks to establish what relationships exist between two or more variables. This study was carried out in Ohafia Education Zone of Abia State, Nigeria. The population of this study comprised all the 3,031 JSS3 students (in-school adolescents) in the 84 public secondary schools in the Zone. (Source: Planning, Research and Statistics Department of the Secondary Education Management Board, Ohafia Education Zone). Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to draw the sample for this study. Three researcher-developed instruments titled; Peer Group Pressure Questionnaire (PGPQ), Questionnaire on Bullying among Students (QBS), and In-school Adolescents' Academic Achievement Proforma (IAAAP) were used to collect data for the study. The PGPQ has two (2) sections; section A and section B. Section "A" elicited personal information of the respondents, such as; Name of school, students' class, class identification number and gender. While section "B" consisted of a total of fifteen (15) items which sought responses on peer group pressure and bullying among the in-school adolescents. The QBS also has two (2) sections; section A and section B. Section "A" elicited personal information of the respondents, such as; Name of school, students' class, class identification number and gender. While section "B" consisted of a total of fifteen (15) items which sought responses on bullying among the in-school adolescents. The PGPQ and QBS is based on a four (4) point scale with response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) with numerical values or points of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

The In-school Adolescents' Academic Achievement Proforma (IAAAP) was used to collect the annual examination scores of the JSSIII students in three subjects (Mathematics, English Language and Basic Science). The instruments; Peer Group Pressure Questionnaire (PGPQ), Questionnaire on Bullying among Students (QBS), and In-school Adolescents' Academic Achievement Proforma (IAAAP) were face-validated by three experts; two from Educational Psychology in the Department of Educational Foundations, and one from Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Science Education, all in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The experts were requested to assess the PGPQ and QBS with respect to clarity of items, simplicity of vocabulary, and relevance of items to the purpose of the study. In addition, the experts were requested to assess the appropriateness and relevance of the columns in the IAAAP. The reliability of the instrument PGPQ and QBS was ascertained by trial-testing the instruments using a similar sample of 20 students from other schools in Okigwe Education Zone of Imo State. This is because Okigwe and Ohafia Education Zones share similar characteristics. The instruments were administered and collected by the researcher with the help of two research assistants. Data gathered were analyzed using simple linear Regression Analysis. Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to answer research questions while regression ANOVA F-statistic was used for the formulated null hypotheses which were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Results are presented in tables based on the research questions and null hypotheses.

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between peer group pressure and academic achievement of in-school adolescents?

Table 1: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship Between Peer Group Pressure and Academic Achievement of In-school Adolescents

Variable	Mean	SD	N	r	r ²
Peer Group Pressure	2.71	1.60	392	0.39	0.15
Academic Achievement	49.69	2.73			

Key: SD= Standard Deviation, N= Number of Respondents, r = Correlation coefficient, r² = Coefficient of determination. The interpretation of the correlation coefficient is based on Nwana's (1979) guide for interpreting r. According to Nwana, a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.00 - 0.20 should be considered as a very low relationship, 0.20 – 0.40 low relationship, 0.40 – 0.60 medium relationship, 0.60 – 0.80 high relationship and 0.80 and above very high relationship.

The result in Table 1 shows that the correlation coefficient (r) obtained between peer group pressure and academic achievement of in-school adolescents was 0.39. This correlation coefficient (r) shows that there exists a direct positively low relationship between peer group pressure and academic achievement of in-school adolescents. Furthermore, the result also shows that the coefficient of determination (r²) associated with the correlation coefficient (r) of 0.39 was 0.15. This coefficient of determination (r²) indicates that 15% of in-school adolescents' academic achievement is attributable to peer group pressure.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between peer group pressure and academic achievement of in-school adolescents.

Table 2: ANOVA F-test of significance in the relationship between Peer Group Pressure and Academic Achievement of In-school Adolescents

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1352.120	1	1352.120	71.193	.000
	Residual	7406.982	390	18.992		
	Total	8759.102	391			

$\alpha = 0.05$

The result in Table 2 shows that an F-ratio of 71.193 with associated exact probability value of 0.00 was obtained. This probability value of 0.00 was compared with 0.05 set as level of significance for testing the hypothesis and it was found to be significant because 0.00 is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that; there is no significant relationship between peer group pressure and academic achievement of in-school adolescents was rejected. Hence, inference drawn was that there is a significant relationship between peer group pressure and academic achievement of in-school adolescents.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents?

Table 3: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Bullying and Academic Achievement of In-school Adolescents

Variable	Mean	SD	N	r	r ²
Bullying	2.74	0.98	392	-0.77	0.59
Academic Achievement	49.69	2.73			

Key: SD= Standard Deviation, N= Number of Respondents, r = Correlation coefficient,
r² = Coefficient of determination

The result in Table 3 shows that the correlation coefficient (r) obtained between bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents was -0.77. This correlation coefficient (r) shows that there exists an inverse relationship between bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents. Furthermore, the result also shows that the coefficient of determination (r²) associated with the correlation coefficient (r) of -0.77 was 0.59. This coefficient of determination (r²) indicates that academic achievement of in-school adolescents decreases by 59% due to bullying.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents.

Table 4: ANOVA F-test of significance in the relationship between Bullying and Academic Achievement of In-school Adolescents

ANOVA ^a					
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	955.812	1	955.812	47.770	.000
Residual	7803.290	390	20.008		
Total	8759.102	391			

$\alpha = 0.05$

The result in Table 2 shows that an F-ratio of 47.770 with associated exact probability value of 0.00 was obtained. This probability value of 0.00 was compared with 0.05 set as level of significance for testing the hypothesis and it was found to be significant because 0.00 is less than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis which stated that; there is no significant relationship between bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents was rejected. Therefore, inference drawn was that there is a significant relationship between bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents.

Discussion of Findings

This study was mainly focused on peer group pressure and bullying as correlates of academic achievement of in-school adolescents in Abia State. The study found a direct, positively low relationship between peer group pressure and academic achievement, with 15% of academic achievement attributable to peer group pressure. This finding aligns with the work of Kindermann (2016), who suggested that peer groups can positively influence academic motivation and engagement through supportive interactions and collaborative learning. Similarly, Ryan (2019) highlighted that adolescents who associate with high-achieving peers are more likely to adopt positive academic behaviors, thereby enhancing their own academic performance. The significant relationship between peer group pressure and academic achievement is further supported by recent studies. According to Wang and Eccles (2018), the

social context of peer groups plays a critical role in shaping students' academic attitudes and behaviors. Their study emphasized that positive peer influences can lead to improved academic outcomes by fostering a conducive learning environment. Thus, the above finding could be so because adolescents are highly influenced by their peers during their developmental years. Positive peer influence can encourage behaviours such as teamwork, motivation, and discipline, which are conducive to academic success. However, the influence is relatively low because other factors (e.g., individual aptitude, teaching quality) also significantly impact academic performance. In other words, because the relationship is low, it indicates that while peer pressure can be beneficial, it is just one of many factors influencing academic achievement.

The inverse relationship between bullying and academic achievement, where academic achievement decreases by 59% due to bullying, is corroborated by extensive research. Espelage, Hong, and Mebane (2019) found that bullying victimization has a detrimental impact on students' academic performance, leading to lower grades and reduced school engagement. Additionally, Thornberg et al. (2018) reported that bullying negatively affects students' concentration, self-esteem, and overall academic success, further validating the study's findings. The significant relationship between bullying and academic achievement is consistent with previous research indicating that bullying is a pervasive issue that significantly hinders academic progress. According to Gini and Pozzoli (2020), bullying creates a hostile school environment that impedes learning and contributes to a decline in academic achievement. Their research highlights the need for effective anti-bullying interventions to mitigate these negative effects and promote a supportive school climate. To this effect, it is imperative to state that the negative effects of bullying are well-documented. Bullying can lead to emotional and psychological trauma, which detracts from a student's ability to focus and perform academically. The fear and anxiety caused by bullying can result in school avoidance and disengagement from learning activities, leading to a substantial decline in academic achievement.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that there is a significant relationship between peer group pressure and academic achievement of in-school adolescents. There is also a significant relationship between bullying and academic achievement of in-school adolescents.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. In-school adolescents should learn different ways of dealing with peer group pressure in school in order to enhance their achievement.
2. Parents should also work in collaboration with school authorities through PTA in order to curb incidence of bullying among students and also promote their achievement.

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