

Peer Acceptance And Academic Performance Of Upper Basic Social Studies Students In Delta State

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Abstract: The study examined the relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance of Social Studies students in Delta State. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated and tested. A correlational ex-post facto research design was adopted. The population comprised 77,658 Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students, from which a sample of 384 students was drawn. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The instrument's validity was confirmed by experts in Measurement and Evaluation, whose suggestions were effected. To determine content and construct validity, the instrument was pretested on 50 students outside the sampled schools. Reliability was established using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), yielding coefficient of 0.78. The questionnaires were administered directly to respondents in their schools with the assistance of three trained research assistants. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to answer research questions, while linear and multiple regression were employed to test hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The results showed a significant relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance of Social Studies students in Delta State. However, no significant relationship was found between peer acceptance and academic performance with regard to gender. The study concluded that peer acceptance is a strong predictor of academic performance among students, irrespective of gender. It was therefore recommended that school principals and Social Studies teachers should organize sensitization programmes, seminars, and interactive sessions to promote healthy peer relationships and improve students' academic performance.

keywords: Peer Acceptance, Academic Performance, gender, Social Studies Students

INTRODUCTION

Education is a major tool for the advancement of individuals and nations. It is the strongest instrument for imparting knowledge, attitudes, skills, and habits to younger generations from time immemorial. This explains why the National Policy on Education (NPE) in Nigeria emphasizes that the education of the child is the child's right. Consequently, several policies and curricula have been implemented over the years to strengthen education in the country. In order to achieve the national goals of education as stipulated in the NPE, the Government of Nigeria made basic education from Basic 1–9 compulsory for all children (Federal Ministry of Education, 2024). Basic education in Nigeria is structured into lower, middle, and upper basic levels. Within this programme, subjects such as Social Studies, English Language, Basic Science, and others are taught to actualize the educational goals of Nigeria. The quest to realize the aims and objectives of the National Policy on Education has made the academic performance of upper basic students a key instrument for assessing the extent to which the educational goals outlined in the NPE are being achieved.

Recently, Social Studies educationists and researchers have expressed concern about the unsatisfactory academic performance of upper basic students in Social Studies. The disturbing nature of this problem has prompted stakeholders in Social Studies education to brainstorm on its causes and possible solutions. In the past, poor student performance was largely attributed to inadequate government funding of education in Nigeria. However, with increased government investment and private sector support in providing better learning facilities and human resources, an improvement in students' performance was expected. Unfortunately, this has not been the case (Owan et al., 2018). This suggests that other factors such as teacher quality, learning environment, individual student barriers, and instructional supervision may be contributing to the problem, particularly in Social Studies.

Academic performance is widely regarded as the extent to which a student achieves short- or long-term educational goals. It reflects the knowledge or competence attained through school tasks and is often measured using standardized tests, grades, or grade point averages (Parajuli & Thapa, 2017). Kassarnig et al. (2018) emphasized that academic performance is a central component of the educational process and a major focus of educational research, since schools exist primarily to ensure students' learning outcomes. However, the problem of unsatisfactory performance in many subjects, including Social Studies, both in internal and external examinations, remains disheartening.

Academic performance is crucial for the successful development of young people in society. Students who excel academically are better equipped to transition into adulthood and achieve occupational and economic success (Razak et al., 2019). Thus, government policies have consistently targeted teaching and learning improvements to enhance academic performance, recognizing it as both an indicator of student achievement and the overall effectiveness of the educational system. Godfrey et al. (2023) are of the view that academic performance determines how successfully students make the transition to higher levels of education and the labour market. Students who perform well in secondary education are more likely to secure admission into

reputable colleges and universities. Similarly, academic performance influences job placement, as students with higher academic scores in tertiary institutions often enjoy greater career opportunities and higher salaries. While strong academic performance yields numerous positive outcomes, poor performance can have unfortunate consequences for students, teachers, and society. Godfrey et al. (2023) reiterated that poor academic performance at the secondary school level reduces students' chances of gaining admission into higher institutions, jeopardizes job opportunities, and in many cases diminishes individual contributions to national development. This is inimical to societal well-being, as it obstructs the core purpose of education, which is to prepare individuals mentally for service to self and society (Alamgir et al., 2017). Students with weak academic records may therefore struggle to cope in an increasingly competitive society. Laursen and Veenstra (2021) emphasized that academic performance is shaped by several factors, including peer acceptance sex, and location. One of these variables—peer acceptance—is the focus of this study. Of particular concern is peer acceptance, which exerts a strong influence on students' academic outcomes in Delta State.

Peer acceptance reflects a student's likeability, social support, and positive affiliation with peers (Xu et al., 2019), and it is widely acknowledged in developmental literature as a key determinant of academic success. Multiple mechanisms explain how peer acceptance can promote performance. A sense of belonging and social support fosters motivation, engagement, and resilience, while also serving as a buffer against stress (Mawak & Odulum, 2024). Empirical studies have shown that students who enjoy higher peer acceptance demonstrate greater self-confidence, stronger school belonging, and higher levels of behavioural engagement (Omotegbona, 2020). Acceptance also provides more opportunities for collaboration, participation in academic activities, and access to instrumental support that enhances academic skills and performance. Consequently, peer acceptance is often positively associated with higher grades and test scores.

Although much of the available evidence is cross-sectional or based on short-term associations, peer acceptance is conceptualized as initiating positive developmental trajectories. Students who are well-accepted and perform strongly are more likely to hold positive perceptions of themselves, their schooling, and their future opportunities, which in turn can reinforce both academic and social success (Nepal & Rogerson, 2020). On the other hand, it has been suggested that peer acceptance may be incidental, reflecting pre-existing traits such as socio-emotional skills that independently predict academic achievement (Ibrahim, 2022). Furthermore, some studies have failed to establish long-term associations between peer acceptance and critical educational outcomes in late adolescence or early adulthood (Wanner & Palmer, 2018), raising questions about the extent of its sustained benefits.

Despite its centrality in the student performance literature, research on the long-term effects of peer acceptance remains limited, with few studies examining its interaction with other school-based factors (Emmer & Stough, 2017). This gap underscores the need for further investigation within the context of Delta State, where peer acceptance may play a crucial role in shaping students' academic outcomes in Social Studies and beyond.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, issues relating to peer acceptance have gained increasing attention as a major factor influencing students' academic performance and social adjustment in schools. Among upper basic students in Delta State, challenges such as peer rejection, bullying, negative peer pressure, and social isolation have become prevalent, thereby posing obstacles to the attainment of educational goals. Instances include students being excluded from group activities, stigmatized due to family background or academic ability, and subjected to ridicule or mockery within the classroom environment. Such experiences not only undermine students' confidence and sense of belonging but also affect their concentration, motivation, and overall achievement in school subjects, including Social Studies.

It is believed that peer acceptance plays a critical role in shaping students' academic engagement and outcomes. When students are accepted by their peers, they are more likely to develop a positive self-concept, collaborate effectively in group tasks, and actively participate in class. Conversely, rejection by peers can lead to withdrawal, low self-esteem, truancy, or even dropping out of school. Social Studies, as a subject that emphasizes citizenship, values, and interpersonal relationships, is particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of poor peer relationships, since learning often involves interaction, discussion, and group-based activities.

Although peer acceptance is theorized to significantly influence students' academic performance, its direct impact on upper basic students in Delta State remains uncertain. Observations suggest that many students struggle with poor interpersonal relationships, low social skills, and a lack of supportive peer networks, which may in turn contribute to declining interest and performance in Social Studies. Peer acceptance can foster collaboration, belongingness, and academic resilience, while peer rejection may breed hostility, disengagement, and academic underachievement. Yet, many schools in Delta State appear to lack adequate structures and interventions to promote positive peer interactions. Despite the theoretical connections between peer acceptance and academic performance, there is limited empirical data on how these dynamics specifically influence upper basic Social Studies students in Delta State. Therefore, the central problem of this study, framed as a question, is: What is the relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance of upper basic Social Studies students in Delta State, Nigeria?

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in this study:

1. What is the relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance of Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students in Delta State?
2. What is the relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance with regard to gender of Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students in Delta State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance of Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students in Delta State.
2. There is no significant relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance with regard to gender of Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students in Delta State.

Methods

The research design employed for this study was the correlational research design. The population consisted of 77,658 Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students enrolled in 476 public secondary schools in Delta State during the 2024/2025 academic session. From this population, a sample of 384 students was selected using the Krejcie and Morgan (2006) statistical table. A multi-stage sampling procedure, involving both simple random sampling and stratified random sampling techniques, was adopted to draw the sample. A well-structured questionnaire, designed by the researcher, was used for data collection.

The instrument was titled Peer Acceptance Questionnaire (PAQ). A second instrument, Students’ Past Terminal Results (SPTR), was also employed. The PAQ consisted of three sections: A, B, and C. Section A collected demographic information such as sex (male or female). Section B contained 15 items on peer acceptance. Respondents indicated their opinions on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument’s face and content validity were confirmed through expert judgment in Measurement and Evaluation, Faculty of Education, Delta State University, Abraka. To establish reliability, the test–retest method and internal consistency method were applied. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to 50 students outside the sampled schools, and the data obtained were analyzed using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The reliability coefficient for the PAQ was 0.78, indicating high reliability. The researcher, with the assistance of three trained research assistants, personally administered the instruments and collected students’ past terminal results to ensure smooth data collection.

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient (r) and coefficient of determination (r^2) were used to answer the research questions. Linear regression was employed to test hypotheses, while multiple regression was specifically used to address research question two. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Questions 1: What is the relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance of Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students in Delta State?

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) Analysis of peer acceptance and academic performance of social studies students in Delta State

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	r ²	r ² adj	r ² %	Remark
Peer acceptance	384	2.48	1.04	.341	.116	.114	11.60	Positive relationship
Academic performance	384	57.62	9.56					

Independent Variable: peer acceptance, Dependent Variable: Academic performance

Table 1 showed the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) value of 0.341 as the amount of the relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance of social studies students in Delta State. The positive relationship indicates that as peer acceptance also increases academic performance of social studies students in Delta State. The coefficient of determination (r^2) value of .116 indicated that Peer acceptance contributed 11.6% to the variation in and academic performance of social studies students in Delta State. Thus, it was concluded that the relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance of social studies students in Delta State is positive relationship.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance with regard to gender of Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students in Delta State?

Table 2: Multiple Correlation (R) Analysis of peer acceptance and Academic performance of social studies students

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	R ^{2adj}	R ² %	Remark
Gender	384	1.61	.4818				
Peer Acceptance	384	2.483	1.044	.920	.845	84.6	Positive relationship
Academic Performance	384	57.62	9.56				

Table 2 showed that the Multiple Correlation of the relationship between communication skill and academic performance with regard to gender was R= .920. This value indicates that impact of gender on the relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance is positive. The coefficient of determination (r^2) value of .846 indicated that gender, communication skills, jointly contributed 84.6% to the variation in academic performance of social studies students in Delta State. Thus, it was concluded that the relationship gender impact on the relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance is positive.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance of Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students in Delta State

Table 4.7: Linear Regression Analysis of the Relationship Between Peer acceptance and Academic performance of social studies students in Delta State

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3814.945	1	3814.945	47.086	.000 ^b
	Residual	29005.678	382	81.021		
	Total	32820.622	383			

a. Dependent Variable: academic performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), peer acceptance

Table 4.7 showed a linear regression analysis of the relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance of social studies students in Delta State. The computed F-value of 47.086 has a p-value of 0.000. Testing the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of 0.000 was less than the alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicated that there was significant relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance of social studies students in Delta State.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between teachers-student relation and academic performance of Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students in Delta State

Table 3: Linear Regression Analysis of the Relationship Between Teachers-student relation and Academic performance of social studies students in Delta State

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	19799.021	1	19799.021	544.330	.000 ^b
	Residual	13021.601	382	36.373		
	Total	32820.622	383			

Table 3 showed a linear regression analysis of the relationship between teachers-student relation and academic performance of social studies students in Delta State. The computed F-value of 544.330 has a p-value of 0.000. Testing the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of 0.000 was less than the alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicated that there was significant relationship between teachers-student relation and academic performance of social studies students in Delta State.

Hypotheses 2

There is no significant relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance with regard to gender of Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students in Delta State.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis of relationship between Peer Acceptance and academic performance with regard to gender of Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students in Delta State

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.841	1.563		1.818	.070
	Gender	-.740	.417	-.038	-1.777	.076
	Peer Acceptance	.661	.207	.072	3.195	.002

$\alpha = 0.05$

Table 4 shows the Multiple Regression Analysis of relationship between Peer Acceptance and academic performance with regard to gender of Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students in Delta State. The result revealed that peer acceptance had a significant relationship with academic performance ($\beta = .072$, $t = 3.195$, $p = .002 < .05$), while gender did not significantly predict academic performance ($\beta = -.038$, $t = -1.777$, $p = .076 > .05$). This implies that students' academic performance in Social Studies is positively influenced by peer acceptance, irrespective of their gender. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected with respect to peer acceptance but retained with respect to gender. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance with regard to gender of Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students in Delta State.

Discussion of Results

The result of hypothesis one revealed that there was a significant relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance of Social Studies students in Delta State. This indicates that students who experienced higher levels of peer acceptance were more likely to perform better academically. It can be said that when students are accepted and supported by their peers, it creates a positive learning environment that boosts self-confidence and motivation, which in turn enhances academic performance. Peer acceptance serves as an emotional support system, helping students to engage more meaningfully in academic tasks and social interactions. This finding is in agreement with the study of Wentzel (2015) who found that positive peer relationships contribute to academic motivation and success. Similarly, Fraser and Walberg (2017) noted that students who feel a sense of belonging and acceptance from their peers are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes towards learning, leading to improved academic outcomes. However, this finding contradicts the work of Thomas (2016) who found no significant relationship between peer interaction and students' performance, attributing performance more to teacher input than peer influence.

The result of hypothesis two revealed that there was no significant relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance with regard to gender of Upper Basic 9 Social Studies students in Delta State. This indicates that the influence of peer acceptance on students' academic performance does not differ between male and female students. In other words, both male and female students benefit equally from peer acceptance in enhancing their academic outcomes. It can be said that when students experience acceptance and support from their peers, it promotes a sense of belonging, motivation, and self-confidence that improves their academic performance, regardless of gender differences. This finding is in line with the study of Liu, Zhao, and Tian (2024), who reported that peer relationships significantly enhance academic achievement, but gender does not moderate this effect. Similarly, Raufelder et al. (2020) observed that the positive role of peers in academic motivation is generally consistent across male and female students, suggesting that social belonging is a universal factor in learning. However, this finding contradicts the work of Uwah, McMahon, and Furlow (2019), who found that female students tend to derive more academic benefits from peer acceptance than their male counterparts, attributing the difference to variations in socialization patterns and peer group dynamics.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that peer acceptance plays an important role in shaping the academic performance of Social Studies students in Delta State. Students who feel accepted and supported by their peers are more likely to

demonstrate higher levels of motivation, confidence, and engagement, which in turn enhance their academic performance. However, the study also established that the relationship between peer acceptance and academic performance does not differ by gender. This implies that both male and female students benefit equally from peer acceptance in their academic pursuits. Therefore, peer acceptance should be recognized as a vital social factor that contributes to students' learning outcomes, irrespective of gender differences.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, these recommendations are made;

1. School principal and social studies teachers should organize sensitization programmes for students across secondary schools in Delta State through seminars and interactive sessions with the aim at promoting peer acceptance. These programmes should educate students on the importance of healthy peer relationships and how it can improve their academic performance.
2. School counselors should educate students on the importance of healthy peer relationships and provide interventions to reduce exclusion, bullying, or negative peer pressure. Creating a positive social environment will help maximize the academic benefits of peer acceptance for all students.

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