

Influence of Peer Group and Formative Assessment Techniques On Economics Students' Academic Performance in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of peer group and formative assessment techniques on Economics students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The study used descriptive survey research design. The target population of this study consisted 53 senior secondary schools with a population of 4,325 students. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 256 students from 25 schools. Questionnaire on Peer Group and Formative Assessment Techniques on Economics Students' Academic Performance (PGFATESAP) was used for data collection. PGFATESAP was validated by experts. Its reliability coefficient was 0.87 established using the Cronbach's alpha method. Data were analyzed using Pearson Chi-square to test formulated hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings from the study revealed that peer group and formative assessment techniques influence Economics students' academic performance positively in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria (χ^2 Cal. 2.67 > χ^2 tab 1.98). It recommended among others that Economics teachers and counsellors should be more involved in counselling students among peer group towards formative assessment techniques and their academic performance in Economics.

Keywords: Peer group, formative assessment techniques, performance.

Introduction

Traditional role of education is to provide answers to national, personal and economic goals and needs; it means that education also has to change to meet the new challenges at the international, national, community and individual levels. By extension, the qualities of training, as well as the number of teacher-trainees produced to meet the needs of secondary school education in Nigeria have to change to meet the exigencies of time. The school is an established academic institution or environment in which the behaviour of an individual is sharpened to get them equipped for occupational socialization. In the secondary school education system, the students get into the social group of "like minds" and interest, as a

result of the various attitudes, skills, knowledge which is acquired through role-play. Economics contributes to the Nation's economic taught thoroughly in order to ensure educational and economic developments. Besides, that, Economics is one of the core subjects in secondary schools, it cannot be taught effectively without a professional teacher and learn by students. The main purpose for conducting tests and assignment on the students' in Economics might be well known to the teacher but often times misunderstood and misinterpreted by the students. A good understanding and better knowledge on why tests, assignment and homework exercises are conducted or given to the students at any particular point in time should be clearly stated and defined. Even teachers must be well equipped and conversant with the testing methods and the reasons for carrying out the tests and assignment. A thorough knowledge on this aspect of study will facilitate and improve the quality of learning activities targeted towards better academic performance in the secondary schools.

Peer group is an agent of socialization that served as the most important agent for the developing students' academic activities. Peer group is the pivot of social change and during interaction with peers; the student's life is transformed from the helpless students into a mature adult. The peer group is the first social group outside the home in which the student attempt to gain acceptance and recognition. Peer group probably has an important influence throughout one's life but they are more critical during the developmental years of childhood and studentship. Students always emulate their mates in whatever form of behaviour they exhibit, particularly that which interest them. Thus, since socialization only refer to changes in behaviour, attitudes, having their origin in interaction with other persons and those which occur through integration, a child learn more through interaction with peers. Peer has been defined as a group of people of same age or social status. Jack and Gamnjoh (2016) saw peer group as the pivot of social change and during interaction with peers, the child's life is transformed from the helpless child into matured adult. A peer group is a small group of students with similarly age, fairly close friends, sharing the same ideas, having the same thinking, activities.

Egharevba in Simon (2015) sees peer as a social group with like minds and common interest which could be found in the homes, school, church etc, trying to pull their resources together in achieving the same goals. Egharevba in Simon argued that through interaction, peers begin to learn and transfer from each other their commitment and loyalty from tribe, religion and other petty principalities. Pettit in Simon (2015) the peer group is a group made up of equals. Peer group are very much found in schools and they play important roles in the process of socializing children to ensure their continuity. Peer groups established their code of conduct and values, which members must follow. Non-conformity with the norms may lead to expulsion or boycott.

Social norms often establish gender differences; in general, this is the case for social conformity, and females are more likely to conform than males. There are differences in the way men and women conform to social influence. Social psychologists, Tomas, Alice

and Linda in Simon (2015) found out that women are more perusable and more conforming than men in group pressure situations that involved surveillance. In situations not involving surveillance, women are less likely to conform. Male conformed more than females 2 out of 4 times when they were presented feminine questions (Frederick in Simon, 2015). Socialization being a life-long process cannot be limited to the family members alone. As student grows older and becoming more matured, it becomes more necessary for the external bodies to be involved in their life. The family is not expected to provide all the education required by the growing child. Each peer group has its code of conduct which does not always conform to adults' standards.

The important thing is that students take their membership of the peer group very serious and attempt to do anything to ensure they are accepted and recognized. Lack of acceptance by the peer disturbs the child especially at adolescent age. Some students have been known to do badly in school not because they lack the academic ability to do well, but because they are disturbed by the fact that they are not accepted by their peer group (Simon, 2015). What makes learning comparative is the fact that the students have equal status with other children. There is an atmosphere of freedom in which each child learns the way of the world from others. The peer group thus becomes more and more important to the student as he advances in age. Other ways in which the peer group can help the child include: teaching the culture of the society at large, making possible social mobility, providing opportunity for the child to play many social roles such as that of a leader, a follower, and teacher of student. The peer groups also help the child to win their independence easily from domination and set before him a goal which is more easily attainable than the expectation of adults. This in itself provides motivation for learning and is mainly responsible for the fact that all children at one stage or the other regard their membership of peer group as very important.

When the family is not supportive, for instance, if the parents work extra jobs and are largely unavailable, their children may turn to their peer for emotional support. This also occur when the conflict between parents and children during adolescence or at any stage during a child's development becomes so great that the child feels pushed away and seeks company elsewhere. Most students in this position do not discriminate about the kind of group they join. They will often turn to a group simply because the group accepts them even if the group involved in negative tendency (Petter & Anthony in Mosha, 2017). The need for affection or closeness is often greater than the need to do the right thing. For some students who feel isolated and abandoned by members of their family being part of a peer group provides such individual with acceptance and security not available at home.

Influence of peer group cannot be over emphasized in a child's life most especially in the area of students' education. Peer group has in one way or the other influenced the life of children academically, socially, morally and psychologically. It helps just like any other agent of school in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. Socialization agents such as family, religion, mass media, and schools among others help in modifying the

behaviour of the child. In conclusion, therefore, the influence of peer group on the academic performance of secondary school students cannot be over emphasized. The peer group forms the main basis through which the child learns lot of empirical facts about his physical and social environment, acquisition of skills and value as well as attitude for a better future.

Formative assessment is the type of assessment that occurs in a short term, as learners are in the process of making meaning of new content and of integrating it into what they already know. Feedback to the learner is immediate to enable the learner change his/her behaviour and understanding right away (Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) 2006). They also stressed that formative assessment enables the teacher to have a rethink on instructional strategies, activities, and content based on students understanding and performance. The teacher's role here is comparable to that of a coach. Formative Assessment can be as informal as observing the learner's work or as formal as a written test or assignment, it seems to be the most powerful type of assessment for improving student understanding and performance in Economics.

Mosha (2017) established that peer group had both positive and negative influence on adolescent students' academic performance. Comparatively, the influence was found higher in government than the private owned secondary schools. It was further established that peers' relationship, socialization, environment, globalization, and drug use had a great influence in determining students' academic performance. Greenberger in Simon (2015) who found that across many cultures perceived behaviour and sanctions of friends (peers) are among the strongest predictors of students' school achievement and social misconduct. Stiggins in Simon (2015) called formative assessment a “win assessment” where students come to understand what it means to be in charge of their own learning, teachers benefit because their students become more motivated to learn, parents benefit as well in seeing higher achievement and greater enthusiasm for learning in their children, school administrators and instructional leaders benefit from the reality of meeting accountability standards and from the public recognition of doing so.

Academic performance refers to the success of students' educational pursuit through test and assignment as formative assessment techniques. Students' academic achievement can be determined through intuitive tests, and various forms of tests ranging from classroom performance, book-work performance to personality test and extra curriculum performance. It is of great importance to carry out a routine check on students' school success and make appropriate enhancements in a bid to achieving the very purpose of schooling. Academic performance refers to how well a student is accomplishing his or her tasks and studies (Scottt's in Melisa, 2020). Grades are certainly the most well-known indicator of academic performance. Grades are the student's “score” for their classes and overall tenure. Grades are most often a tallying or average of assignment and test scores and may often be affected by factors such as attendance and instructor's opinion of the student as well. Grading systems vary greatly by country and school; common scales

include a percentage form 1-100, lettering systems from A-F, and grade point averages (GPA) from 0-4.0 or above.

Ward, Stocker and Murray-Ward in Melisa (2020) opined that academic performance refers to the outcome of education; the extent to which the students, teachers or institution have achieved their educational goals. Academic performance is the ability to study and remember facts and being able to communicate one's knowledge verbally or written on paper (Answers, in Melisa, 2020). In the context of this study, academic achievement refers to the extent to which students have achieved mastery of the objectives of the subjects they are exposed to in school. According to Aremu and Sokan in Melisa (2020), academic performance has been observed in school subjects especially mathematic and English language among secondary school students.

The trend of poor performance of secondary school students has been reported by the West African Examination Council (WAEC). The WAEC result analysis for the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 revealed the following statistics of the performance of Nigerian students' in secondary schools in public examination. The percentages of students who passed during the years were reported to be 22, 54, 13.76, 22.54, 24.94, and 25.99 percent respectively. That is, on the average, less than a quarter (21.94 percent) of the students that sat for the May/June West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations obtained credits in five subjects including English and Mathematics during the five years (WAEC, 2007-2011).

West African Examination Council Zonal Coordinator, revealed the statistics of the 2012/2013 WASSCE. A total of 324, 998 candidates registered for the Examination 168,835 are male while 141,242 are female candidates who registered for the WAEC examination. The results of 51,876 candidates, representing 16.73% of candidates' result withheld by the WAEC Board, based on various reports, mostly for these candidates alleged involvement in examination malpractice, while another Statistics shows that 250,487 candidates representing 80.78% have 2 credits and above, while 217,161 candidates, representing 70.03% of the total 2012 WAEC candidates have three credits and above. Several factors generally, have been identified as causes of poor academic performance. Morakinyo in Melisa (2020) believed that the falling level of academic performance is attributable to teachers' non-use of verbal reinforcement strategy. Welsh in Melisa (2020) found out that the attitude of some teachers to their job, poor teaching methods and the like influenced students' academic performance in Economics.

Peer influence is not a simple process where youth are passive recipients of influence from others. In fact, peers who become friends tend to already have a lot of things in common. Peers with similar interests, similar academic standard, and enjoy doing the same things tend to gravitate towards each other (De Guzman, 2007). However, a student who associates with fellow peers who are not motivated in learning is affected academic negatively (Ryan, 2000). Literature indicates that peers who are interested in academic

issues are more likely to associate with students who have the same interest. Landau (2002) argued that students who form positive peer group make more effort during learning, doing social activities, also fear to engage in delinquent activities. However, Ryan (2000) argued that those students who are identified as jock-popular perceived more pressure in the area of school involvement and less pressure toward misconduct.

The influence of the peer group is a process by the amount and the style of help that students 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 (Temitope & Christy, 2015). It is thought that intelligent students do separated to help their peer bring up their academic performance in Economics. Likewise, girls with good friends who are considered intelligent tend to do better in school; all attributable to the fact that they share a common team of similar aspiration (Landau, 2002). Peers influence each other in several ways. Many peer groups can exert a positive influence on their friends. Also, there are some peer groups who can exert a negative influence on their friends and these groups tend to share low aspiration of going to tertiary institution or pursuing certain careers. There may be other value in place, such as taking care of the family or making quick money rather than pursuing education first (Ide, 2006).

Ryan (2000) opined that students who associates with fellow peers who are not motivated in learning affects academic negatively. The fact that they did not attend lessons as planned; their performances were said by the teachers to be low. These students were well known by class teachers as well as their fellow students at the schools. Landau (2002) claimed that economics students who are interested in academic issues are more likely to associate with students who have the same interest. In another development, socializing with adolescent peer group in the study yielded positive results. It was found out that students developed communication skill through socialization. Mapesa in Mosha (2017) who found out that the amount of money which adolescent students spend at school has either positive or negative influence on students' academic performance. This means that the idea of parents giving their children money to spend at school was good in a sense that they would be able to buy food (bites) during break time because government schools do not provide food (lunch) to their students. Tope (2011) and Mwinsukha in Mosha (2017) found out that peer group can influence adolescent students in academic performance either in the positive or negative way. Mosha (2017) found out that peer group had an influence on adolescent students' academic performance in two folds; positively and negatively. The findings indicated that 48 students out of 120 (40%) had a positive influence on adolescent students' academic performance at selected schools. This is because adolescents associate with friends based on shared characteristics. Based on this, peer group had friends who liked studying together at the schools. Getzels in Ajibade (2016) asserted that group action is facilitated when teacher uses indirect rather than direct influences. If the teacher is accommodating, creative and intelligent, there will be active participation from the pupils during class work and extra-curricular activities. It is believed that a teacher directs learning and the degree in which he does this determines the total level

of effectiveness.

Coleman in Ajibade (2016) opined that peer group in many schools exert a strong influence on academic performance. The reason is that, pupils care so much about being liked and respected by their peers and therefore will try to impress them both in academics and other aspects. In the secondary schools, pupils come in contact with peer from different geographical areas, provinces and ethnic groups. The opportunity to mix with young pupils from different social background is likely to readily mix up with another pupil of the same ethnic background (Etim in Ajibade, 2016). Ajibade (2016) found out that peer group influences learning and that certain factors like the social economic status and parental factor as they determine membership in most groups. The study also found out that pupils are closer to their friends than to their teachers and parents concerning their academics and that parents monitor their children's peer group association. Jack and Gamnjoh (2017) found out that there was significant difference between students that belong to peer group and those that do not belong to peer group on the academic achievement of chemistry; there was no significant difference between the academic achievement of male and female chemistry students that are involved in peer group; and there is a positive and significant relationship between peer group influence and academic achievement of students in chemistry. Rubén, Marcos, Javier and José (2017) found out that there is relationship between academic results and homework, time is negative at the individual level but positive at school level. An increase in the amount of homework a school assigns is associated with an increase in the differences in students' time spent on homework. An optimum amount of homework is proposed which schools should assign to maximize gains in achievement for students overall.

The blame for poor academic performance among secondary school students could be attributable to a variety of factors such as students' inability to manage their time, peers influence, family factors and the likes. Parents, teachers, curriculum, experts and evaluators have expressed considerable concern over the deteriorating students' performance in public examinations. Students socialize with the people with which they associate. Through interaction over many years, acceptable social customs are taught and fostered. Other children as well as adults can have a great impact on a broad range of issues in the child's life including achievement in school. The research is geared towards having a proper understanding of the way social interaction affect academic performance which is very important for parents, educators, and policy makers. The immediate environment such as peer, family, school, religion and other factors can encourage or discourage students' academic performance. This research is thus an inquiry into the influence of peer group and formative assessment techniques on economics students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Hypotheses

1. Peer group and formative assessment by test do not influence economics students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.
2. Peer group and formative assessment by assignment do not influence economics

students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

Methodology

The study used descriptive survey research design in view of the wide spread coverage of information. The target population of this study consist 53 senior secondary schools with 4325 students. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 256 students from 25 schools. Questionnaire on Peer Group and Formative Assessment Techniques on Economics Students' Academic Performance (PGFATESAP) was used for data collection. A total of 25 items were constructed and designed into 5-points Likert format of scale given as follows: Strongly Agreed (5), Agreed (4), Undecided Disagreed (3), Disagreed (2) and Strongly Disagreed (1). PGFATESAP was constructed by the researchers and validated through a pilot study and a panel of 2 experts in Guidance and Counseling and Economics Department in Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. The researchers made the necessary amendments to the questionnaire as requested by the experts, thereafter, a pilot survey was made, data collected from the pilot survey were analysed using the Cronbach alpha method and a reliability coefficient of 0.87 index was established. The researchers personally administered the questionnaire assisted by the research assistants. In the course of responding to the instrument, the respondents were not allowed to consult or discuss with their classmate or friends before answering the questions. Pearson Chi-square was used to test formulated hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The data obtained from respondents are presented in Tables 1 to 2 below.

Hypothesis 1: Peer group and formative assessment by test do not influence economics students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

Table 1

Results of Pearson Chi-square (λ^2) Analysis of Peer Group and Formative Assessment by Test on Economics Students' Academic Performance

Variables	No of Respondents	Df	λ^2 Cal	λ^2 tab	Decision
Test	209				
		254	2.67	1.98	H ₀ Rejected
Academic Performance	47				

Table 1 shows the results for peer group and formative assessment by test on economics students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. It is evident that, at 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom of 254, the λ^2 tab value of 1.98 for significance, peer group and formative assessment by test influenced economics students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

Therefore, since the calculated value of χ^2 is greater than the critical value, the null hypothesis was rejected. Hence, peer group and formative assessment technique by test influenced economics students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. This implies that, the peer group and formative assessment technique by test improved economics students' academic performance positively.

Hypothesis 2: Peer group and formative assessment by assignment do not influence economics students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

Table 2

Results of Pearson Chi-square (χ^2) Analysis of Peer Group and Formative Assessment by Assignment on Economics Students' Academic Performance

Variables	No of Respondents	Df	χ^2_{Cal}	χ^2_{tab}	Decision
Assignment	184	254	1.83	1.98	H ₁ Rejected
Academic Performance	72				

Table 2 shows the results for peer group and formative assessment by assignment on economics students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. It is evident that, at 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom of 254, the χ^2_{tab} value of 1.98 for significance, peer group and formative assessment by assignment technique did not influence economics students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, since the calculated value of χ^2 is less than the critical value, the hypothesis was not rejected. Hence, peer group and formative assessment technique by assignment did not influence economics students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. This implies that, the peer group and formative assessment technique by assignment do not influenced economics students' academic performance positively.

Discussion

First finding of the study revealed that peer group and formative assessment by test influence economics students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. This finding is in line with Mosha (2017) who found out that peer group had both positive and negative influence on adolescent students' academic performance at selected schools. The finding also agreed with the work of Mosha (2017) who found out that peer group had an influence on adolescent students' academic performance in two folds; positively and negatively. This is because adolescents associate with friends based on shared characteristics. That meant that if peer group had interest in studying hard and performed well, it is likely that they would influence their fellow adolescent students to

perform better like them.

Second finding of the study revealed that peer group and formative assessment of assignment does not influence Economics students' academic performance in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. This finding disagreed with the research work of Landau (2002) who found out that economics students who are interested in academic issues are more likely to associate with students who have the same interest. It was also found out that students developed communication skill through socialization. The find further disagreed with work of Mapesa in Mosha (2017) who found out that the amount of money which adolescent students spend at school has either positive or negative influence on students' academic performance. This means that the idea of parents giving their children money to spend at school was good in a sense that they would be able to buy food (bites) during break time because government schools do not provide food (lunch) to their students.

The finding also disagreed with the following findings: Ajibade (2016) who found out that peer group influences learning and certain factors like the social economic status and parental factor as they determine membership in most groups; Jack and Gamnjoh (2017) who found out that there is significant difference between students that belong to peer group and those that do not belong to peer group on the academic achievement of chemistry; there was no significant difference between the academic achievement of male and female chemistry students that are involved in peer group; and there is a positive and significant relationship between peer group influence and academic achievement of students; Rubén, Marcos, Javier and José (2017) who found out that there is relationship between academic results and homework time is negative at the individual level but positive at school level. An increase in the amount of homework a school assigns is associated with an increase in the differences in students' time spent on homework. Furthermore, it was observed that age status determines the extent of peer group influence on academic performance. At this time, peers often endorse the adoption of antisocial standards that inevitably conflict with parental values and standards. This reference is thus a proof that there is a transition with which peer pressure is observed and conformed to, with respect to age status. It is also observed that respondents agreed that “the older and more matured students, the lesser the effects of peer groups.

Conclusion

It is obvious that among the numerous factors affecting students' academic performance, peer group cannot be undermined as it is a principal factor especially during the period of studentship. Peer group influence, formative assessment techniques and academic performance of Economics students are interring related. The researchers submitted that changes observed in students' academic performance is associated with influence of peer group. It is worthy, therefore, to state that a large percentage of the incompetence observed in adolescents which includes poor academic performance is rooted in his/her relationship with peers. The consequences of negative peer influence are overwhelming as not only

does it affect present behaviour and attitude towards issues, it also has a long run effect on future prospect.

Based on the findings of this study, the following were recommended:

1. The school in general should ensure that there is guidance and counselling services within its environment to help and assist students being negatively influenced by peers and also students with peculiar problems especially those from broken homes as they have been observed to conform more to peer pressure as compared to others from stable homes.
2. The school should also make its environment a favourable learning atmosphere in terms of instructional materials, library and proper/adequate sanitation and also, limiting the rate of inflicting punishment on students but rather replacing it with counselling. School authorities/teachers should pay attention towards encouraging peer group activities in schools especially in the area of group discussion.

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