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INFLUENCE OF PEER GROUP ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Career development is a complex process influenced by various social, psychological and environmental factors, with peer groups playing a crucial role. This study examined the influence of peer group on career development among public secondary schools in Anambra State. The study was guided by 3 research questions. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 5000 senior secondary schools students in Onitsha north local government area, Anambra

State. The sample size was 500 selected using proportionate sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a Self structured questionnaire (IPGSCDPSSC). Three research questions guided the study and the research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation scores for research question one while average mean and standard deviation scores were used for research questions two and three. Among the findings of the study include the followings. Peers serve as sources of motivation, guidance and information, shaping individuals' perspectives on career opportunities and success. Positive peer influence can encourage career exploration, enhance self-efficacy, and provide networking opportunities, while negative peer pressure may lead to career indecision or choices misaligned with personal interests and abilities. The study also highlights the role of peer mentorship and collaborative learning in skill development and career readiness. The following recommendations were proffered and they include: the understanding of the influence of peer groups can help educators, career counselors and policy makers design strategies to foster constructive peer interactions that support positive career outcomes.

Keywords: Influence, Peer Group, Career Development, Public Secondary Schools.

INTRODUCTION

Career development is a lifelong process that involves acquiring skills, knowledge, experience, and professional connections that contribute to long-term success. It goes beyond simple choosing a career path, it includes continuous learning, adapting to technology and advancing in one's chosen profession. No wonder McDonald and Hite (2016) viewed it as the process an individual may undergo to evolve their occupational status. Likewise (Jennifer 2011) defined it as the total encompassment of an individual's work-related experiences, leading up to the occupational role they may hold within an organization. Career development involves career exploration, career planning and career management. It include the process of making decisions for long term learning, to align personal needs of physical or psychological fulfillment with career advancement opportunities. For adolescents and young adults, it is important to explore their general interests, find out the skills that are important in those career areas, and begin to seek for experiences that will open doors to the careers they are interested in. Building a career, needs assessment of skills, interests and looking at how to build additional skills and credentials to take advantage of current opportunities. (Jennifer Leonard 2011).

While personal ambition, education, and family background, influence career development, the role of peer groups is often overlooked. Peers can shape an individual's career growth by providing motivation, mentorship, networking opportunities, and exposure to new ideas and professional pathways. Peer group is a group of adolescents with close and interdependent relationships. Obi and Okoye (2019) viewed peer groups as comprising people of the same age and ability knitted together by feelings derived by a common concern as seekers of what is desirable for the group.

This view was collaborated by Okudo, Okwunalu and Nwankwo (2023) who viewed peer group as persons bound together by certain characteristics majorly age. They maintained that

peer group is an important aspect of socialization and contributes in determining the personality appearance of the adolescents. Through their groups, students are facilitated to interact and exchange opinions on career issues using various sources. Besides, peer acceptance is crucial for students in the adolescent phase, so they find it challenging to stay away from their friends (Sathiyan, 2022). In the teenage phase, they express their plans, aspirations, career exploration, academic problems, and difficulties in life to their close friends freely and openly. A peer group allows individuals to interact, get along, support, and motivate each other (Fajriyah, Demartoto, & Murti, 2018). These groups play pivotal role in influencing each other's behaviors, values, and decisions. In addition, they share interest and goals, provide environments where individuals collaboratively acquire new skills and knowledge, enhancing personal and collective development.

According to Abdul et al (2023) the communication and mutual encouragement among peer groups can serve as an alternative for solving career-related problems, aside from guidance and counseling services. However, the influences from peers (peer group) can be positive or negative, depending on their position. On the positive side, interacting with ambitious and goal-oriented peers can inspire individuals to set higher professional goals, develop critical skills, and seek career-enhancing opportunities. Peers often share valuable career-related information, such as job openings, internships, and skill building programs. Additionally, healthy competition among peers can encourage professional growth and self-improvement. However, peer influence is not always positive. Some individuals may experience pressure to conform to their friends' career expectations, leading them to pursue paths that do not align with their strengths or interests. Negative peer influence can also discourage risk-taking, innovation, or career advancement, particularly if individuals are surrounded by peers with a lack of ambition or resistance to change.

Furthermore, Okudo, Obumse and Okafor (2023) noted that among the factors casual to deviant behaviours or social vices include socialization styles which the peer group is at the hub and could lead to various forms of mal-adaptations when wrong influences are encountered.

Apart from the above, Okudo, Okwunalu and Okafor (2023) viewed location to be a very strong factor in child's development and parenting. According to them, literature is replete indicating that rural adolescents are hindered by amenities, not facing challenges of urbanization as well as modernization etc. This view was buttressed by Okudo, Obumse and Nwudu (2023) who noted that location has significant impact on the adaptation of the adolescents. This is because rural areas are impoverished infrastructure wise and there is a development lag between the child raised in the city and their counter parts who had no opportunity to access contemporary technological gadgets.

Another significant factor of interest is the influence of gender on the career development of public secondary schools in Anambra State. There was no consensus on the role gender plays in child adaptation. Literature has shown that some studies favour male dominance, others proffers female dominance while some maintain neutrality. Researchers such as Oludipe (2012) Markumari and Ajaui (2017) argued strongly that gender has significant impact. This

view was supported by the findings of Okudo, Obumse and Nwudu (2023) in their work on effect of co-operative learning technique on gender (male and female) and they discovered a value difference between the male and female thereby indicating a positive influence for both gender even though the female scores were higher than the male scores.

Despite these significant impacts of peer interactions on career development, there is limited research on how these influences shape long-term professional growth. Understanding the role of peer influence in career development can help individuals, educators, and career counsellors to provide better guidance for professional success. This study seeks to explore these dynamics and offer insights into how peer groups contribute to or hinder career advancement.

Statement of the Problem

Career development is a continuous process that involves gaining skills, experiences, and knowledge necessary for professional growth. While personal ambition, family background, and education play key roles, peer groups significantly influence how individuals develop their careers. Peers can provide motivation, exposure to opportunities, and networking support, but they can also create pressure, unrealistic expectations, or distractions that may hinder career progress.

Many young people rely on their peer groups for career related advice, guidance and even job opportunities. However, not all peer influences lead to positive outcomes. Some individuals may pursue career paths based on peer expectations rather than personal strengths and aspirations, while others may develop confidence and resilience through healthy peer competition. Despite the impact of peer influence on career development, there is limited research on how these social interactions shape long-term career growth, skill acquisition and professional success.

This study seeks to explore the role of peer groups in career development, examining both the influence of location and gender in their career aspirations. Understanding these dynamics can help individuals, educators, and career counsellors provide better guidance for professional growth.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the influence of peer group on career development of public secondary school students from Anambra State of Nigeria. This study aims to:

1. Determine the influence of peer group on career development over time.
2. Determine the influence of gender on the career development of adolescents.
3. Investigate the influence of location on the career development of the adolescents.

Research Questions

1. What are ways the peer groups influence career development of public secondary school students from Anambra State?
2. What is the influence of gender of the peers on their career development?
3. What is the influence of peer location on the career development of the students?

Method of the Study

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 5,000 senior secondary school students in Onitsha North local government area Anambra State. The sample size was 500 drawn using proportionate sampling technique at the ratio of (280:220) famale/male, (320:180) urban/rural. The questionnaire was a researcher developed instrument titled influence of peer group on career development in public secondary school questionnaire (IPGCDIPSSQ) consisting of 20 items.

The reliability of the instrument was established using test-retest method and data collected was analyzed using Cronbach's alpha which yielded a co-efficient of 0.78. The questionnaire instrument was administered through the assistance of three researchers. The data collected was analyzed using mean scores to answer the research question one and values below the acceptable mean score were considered low impact. While research questions two and three were answered using average mean scores.

Presentation of Results

Research question one: What are the ways peer groups influence the career development of public secondary school students from Anambra State Nigeria.

Table one: mean and standard deviation scores of peer group influence on career development.

S/N	Item on the influence on peers in social behavior	$\overline{x}$	SD	Decision
1.	Shares same ambitions on career	2.98	0.69	
2.	Inspires me to set high professional goals	2.81	0.71	
3.	Discusses career together with me	3.01	0.64	
4.	Helps me develop critical skills	2.87	0.65	
5.	Ambitious about seeking career enhancing opportunities	3.08	0.60	
6.	Shares valuable career related information	3.02	0.74	
7.	Shares skills building programs	2.74	0.68	
8.	Encourages healthy competitions	2.95	0.72	
9.	Discusses our parents career tapse	2.97	0.70	
10.	Encourages self improvement	2.84	0.69	
11.	Discourages risk taking	2.92	0.74	
12.	Discusses career competency	2.94	0.65	
13.	Attends career programs	2.81	0.69	
14.	Visits counsellors for career guidance	2.79	0.73	
15.	Conforms to friends career expectations	2.86	0.78	
16.	Shares occupational information magazines/journals/fliers	2.86	0.62	
17.	Shares holidays job openings	2.77	0.63	
18.	Has valuable information on internships	2.85	0.72	
19.	Shows concern and interest about the future	2.69	0.70	
20.	Encourages excursions to firms and industries	2.97	074	
Average Mean Score		**3.16**	**0.71**	

The table one above revealed the adolescents rating of the influence of peer group on their career development and interestingly the table revealed that all the items were scored high and above the acceptable mean score of 2.50 indicating that the items had significant influence on peer career development.

Research Question two: What is the influence of gender peers on their career development?
Table two: Average mean score and standard deviation table on the influence of peer gender on career development.

Source of variation	**N**	$\overline{x}$	**SD**
Male	280	3.02	0.62
Female	220	2.79	0.76

The table above revealed the students rating of peer gender influence on their career development. The table revealed that the sample size consisted of 280 males and 220 females and the males rated their gender peer influence to be 3.02 while the female rated theirs as 2.77 indicating that peer gender has significant influence on the career development of their adolescents. The table further revealed that the males rated their peer gender influence (3.02) higher than the female (2.77).

Research Question three: what is the influence of location of the peers on their career development?
Table three: Average mean and standard deviation score table on the influence of peer location on career development.

Source of variation	**N**	$\overline{x}$	**SD**
Urban	320	3.11	0.68
Rural	180	2.70	0.70

The table three above showed the adolescents rating of the influence of peer location on their career development. The table revealed the value of (320), (3.11) and (0.68) for urban students number, average mean scores and standard deviations respectively. It also revealed the value of (180), (2.70) and 0.70 for rural students number, average mean scores and standard deviation respectively. The above results indicated that peer location is a factor in their career development since the average mean score was found be more than 2.50 for urban and rural students. Even though the urban students rated their peer location influence over the rural students rating with a value difference of 0.41.

Discussion of Findings
The findings of the study was discussed in line with the specific purpose of study which sought to determine the influence of the following

(a) Peer group on career development
(b) Peer gender on career development
(c) Peer location on career development

Concerning the peer group influence on career development as was indicated by table one, it was revealed that all the twenty (20) items in the table were rated above the mean score

revealing that peer group influences the career development of adolescents. The students rating revealed the following, shares career ambitions (2.96); develop initial skills (2.87) career enhancing opportunities (3.08) shares job information (2.86) etc. The above finds affirms to views of Abdul et al (2023). Fajriyah, Demartoto & Murti, (2018) who noted that the influences from peers can foster career ambitions, inspire them to set higher goals, develop critical skills seek career enhancing and enabling opportunities etc.

On the influence of peer gender on career development as was revealed in table two, it was discovered that peer gender influenced significantly the students career development. The table revealed a male rating of (280), (3.02) and 0.62 for number, average mean score and standard deviations respectively. While the female rating was (220), (2.77) and 0.76 for number, average mean score and standard deviations. This is in line with the findings of Okudo, Obumse and Okwunalu (2023), Oludipe (2012), Markumari and Ajaiu (2017) who argued strongly that gender has significant influence on adolescent development.

Concerning the influence of peer location on career development of secondary school children as was shown in table three, it was discovered that the urban peer students rated the career influenced as (3.20, 3.11, 0.68) for number, average mean scores and standard deviations scores. The rural peer figures also revealed (180, 2.70, 0.70) respectively for number, average mean score and standard deviation scores. The above results (3.11 and 2.70) respectively for average mean score influence of urban and rural students revealed a score greater than the mean score mark (2.50) thus indicating that location has influence in career development. This findings collaborates the views of Okudo, Okwunalu and Okafor (2023) who viewed location to be a very strong factor in child's development and parenting.

Furthermore, the table revealed a gap of (0.41) between the average mean scores of urban (3.11) and rural (2.70) secondary school children showing that urban students had greater career influence than their rural counter parts. This finding was supported by findings of Okudo, Obumse and Nwudu (2023) who noted that location has significant impact on adaptation of adolescents and went further to state that rural areas are impoverished infrastructure wise and there is a developmental lag between the child raised in the city and their counterpart from the rural communities.

CONCLUSION

The study was on the influence of peer group on the career development of public secondary school students from Anambra State. It determined how peer group pressure decides the job/occupations of the children from Anambra state of Nigeria. The study also determined how peer gender and peer location influences the career development of the same. Interestingly the study revealed that peer group, peer gender and location are all factors of strong influence in adolescent development.

Recommendations

1. Parents, teachers, institutions and policy makers should be sensitized on influence peer groups have on career development.

2. Parents should also monitor their children's peer circle so that their peer will not influence them negatively on their career development.
3. Students should be sensitized on the roles played by their peers on their career development.
4. Counsellors should be properly equipped and knowledgeable about peer influence in other to counter its negative implications on them.

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