



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND EXTERNAL STUDIES

SCHOOL OF DISTANCE AND LIFE LONG LEARNING

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

**THE PEER INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG
MAKERERE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN UGANDA**

NIYONSABA ELIAS

REG. 21/U/06635/EXT

**A RESEARCH SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ADULT
AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A BACHELOR OF
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WORK DEGREE OF MAKERERE.**

2025

DECLARATION

I Niyonsaba Elias, hereby declare that this work entitled “The peer influence on academic performance of students of Makerere University” is my original work and it has never been submitted in any institution for any award. I have read the regulations of the university with regard to plagiarism and here declare that I abided by all of them.

Niyonsaba Elias

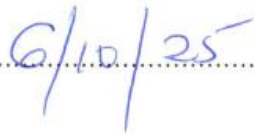
Signature: .....

Date 6/10/25.....

APPROVAL

This is to acknowledge that this work entitled "The peer influence on academic performance of students of Makerere University" has been done under my supervision and is now ready for submission to the Department of Adult and Community Education.

Signature: 

Date: 

Dr. Rose Atugonza

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank the Almighty God for the gift of life, provision, and protection enabling me to take on my work with the execution of my research project.

I would like to thank my organization SOS Children's village Entebbe for the great financial support, and prayers throughout school and also while doing my research. Not forgetting my beloved parents who have also been my guide throughout the journey.

Am also grateful to my Supervisor Dr. Rose Atugonza for the endless guidance and support to ensure that I finish my research productively and make quality work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
APPROVAL.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vii
ABSTRACT.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE:BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY.....	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1. Background to the Study.....	1
1.2. Problem Statement.....	2
1.3. Objectives of the Study.....	3
1.3.1. General Objective.....	3
1.3.2. Specific Objectives.....	3
1.4. Research Questions.....	3
1.5. Scope of the Study.....	4
1.5.1. Geographical Scope.....	4
1.5.3. Content Scope.....	4
1.5.4. Time Scope.....	4
1.6. Significance of the Study.....	4
1.6.1. Academic Contribution.....	4
1.6.2. Policy and Practice.....	4
1.6.3. Student Support Services.....	4
1.6.4. Education Stakeholders.....	5
1.7. Justification of the Study.....	5
CHAPTER TWO:LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
2.0 Introduction.....	7
2.2 Definition of Key Terms.....	7
2.3 Theoretical Review.....	8
2.3.1 Bandura’s Social Learning Theory.....	8
2.3 Conceptualizing Peer Influence.....	8

2.4 Peer Influence on Academic Attitudes and Motivation	9
2.5 Peer Influence on Study Habits and Learning Behaviors	9
2.6 Peer Influence and Academic Performance Outcomes	9
2.7 Knowledge Gaps	10
CHAPTER THREE:RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	11
3.0. Introduction.....	11
3.1 Research Design.....	11
3.2 Study Population.....	11
3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques	11
3.4 Data Collection Methods	13
3.6 Data Quality Control Methods.....	13
3.6.1 Pre-testing of Research Instruments (Pilot Testing)	14
3.6.2 Use of Standardized and Structured Questionnaires.....	14
3.6.3 Daily Review of Completed Questionnaires.....	14
3.6.4 Confidential Storage of Data	14
3.7 Ethical Considerations	14
3.8 Limitations of the Study.....	14
CHAPTER FOUR:DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION	15
4.1 Introduction.....	15
4.2 Theme One: Peer Influence on Students’ Academic Attitudes and Motivation.....	15
4.3 Theme Two: Peer Influence on Study Habits and Learning Behaviors	16
4.4 Theme Three: Peer Influence and Academic Performance Outcomes	16
4.4 Objective Three: To Analyze the Negative Effects of Peer Influence on Academic Outcomes	19
4.5 Objective Four: To Examine the Relationship Between Peer Influence and Academic Performance Outcomes.....	20
4.5 Summary of Key Findings	20
CHAPTER FIVE:SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	22
5.0. Introductions	22
5.1 Summary of Findings.....	22
5.1.1. Peer Influence on Academic Attitudes and Motivation:	22

5.1.2. Peer Influence on Study Habits and Learning Behaviors:	22
5.1.3. Peer Influence on Academic Performance Outcomes:.....	23
5.2 Conclusion	23
5.3 Recommendations.....	23
5.3.1. For Students:	23
5.3.2. For University Administration:	23
5.3.3. For Lecturers and Academic Staff:	24
5.4 Suggestions for Further Study	24
REFERENCES.....	25
APPENDICES.....	27
APPENDIX I:CONSENT FORM.....	27
APPENDIX II:QUESTIONNAIRE.....	29
APPENDIX III:QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE	34

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP Academic Performance

CEES College of Education and External Studies

CGPA Cumulative Grade Point Average

COSCIS College of Natural Sciences and College of Social Sciences

FGDs Focus Group Discussions

HE Higher Education

PI Peer Influence

PP Peer Pressure

SLT Social Learning Theory

UG Uganda

ABSTRACT

Peer influence plays a critical role in shaping the academic behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes of university students. This study investigates the influence of peer influence on academic performance among Makerere university students in Uganda. Peer influence in this context refers to the positive or negative impact that students' social interactions and networks exert on their academic motivation, study habits, and achievement. While some peers encourage academic discipline, collaboration, and goal-setting, others promote disengagement, absenteeism, and academic neglect, making peer influence a double-edged factor in higher education outcomes.

The study is anchored on Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which explains learning through observation and modeling; Astin's Theory of Student Involvement, which emphasizes the role of peer engagement in academic success; and Tinto's Student Integration Model, which highlights the importance of social and academic integration in retention and performance. A descriptive cross-sectional design will be used, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive analysis. Data will be collected using structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. The study population will include undergraduate students from selected public and private universities, with the sample size determined through Yamane's (1967) formula and selected using stratified random sampling for representativeness. Data analysis will combine descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression techniques for quantitative data, while thematic analysis will be employed for qualitative findings.

Ethical standards including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation will be maintained. Anticipated challenges such as non-responses and time constraints will be mitigated through proper planning and pilot testing of research tools. The study is expected to provide evidence on how peer influence shapes academic performance in Uganda's higher education sector, filling a critical gap in African-based educational research. Findings will inform policy makers, university administrators, lecturers, and student support services on strategies to harness positive peer influence while reducing the effects of negative peer behaviors.

CHAPTER ONE:

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

The academic success of university students is shaped by a variety of internal and external factors, ranging from personal motivation and family background to institutional resources and social influences. Among these, peer influence stood out as a powerful and dynamic force that could either enhance or hinder academic achievement. University students, particularly in Uganda, often relied on their peers for social support, academic collaboration, emotional encouragement, and behavioral modeling. These interactions significantly affect students' learning behaviors, attitudes toward education, and ultimately, their academic performance.

Understanding the role of peer influence in academic performance is particularly important in the Ugandan higher education context, where universities are diverse in structure, culture, and resources. While positive peer influence fostered productive study habits, academic motivation, and a supportive learning environment, negative peer pressure lead to distraction, reduce academic focus, or engagement in detrimental behaviors. Despite its significance, peer influence remains under-researched in Uganda, especially from an academic performance perspective. This study, therefore, sought to fill that gap by investigating how peer influence impacts academic outcomes among students in Makerere University.

1.1. Background to the Study

Academic performance is one of the most important indicators of educational success at the university level. It determines not only a student's progression and graduation prospects but also their future opportunities in employment and further education. Traditionally, academic performance has been linked to factors such as student motivation, learning environments, socio-economic background, access to educational resources, and institutional support systems. However, an increasingly significant and often overlooked factor is the influence of peer relationships.

In the university setting, peer influence seems to be prominent due to the social nature of campus life. Students often find themselves in study groups, clubs, and social circles that shape their academic habits, attitudes, and behaviors. Positive peer influences—such as motivation to study,

collaborative learning, and sharing of resources—lead to improved academic engagement and performance. On the other hand, negative peer influences—such as pressure to engage in non-academic activities, absenteeism, or peer-led distractions—contribute to poor academic outcomes.

With rising student enrolment and increasing diversity in university populations, understanding the social interactions among students has become more important. Despite this, there remained limited empirical research focusing specifically on how peer influence affects academic performance in Makerere University. Most studies focused on curriculum delivery, institutional challenges, or personal student factors, overlooking the social dimension of student life.

This study sought to explore the role peer influence plays in shaping academic success among students of Makerere university, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of how different peer dynamics contributed to or hindered academic achievement. The findings informed interventions that promoted supportive peer cultures and enhanced academic outcomes in Makerere University.

1.2. Problem Statement

Academic performance remained a major concern for universities in Uganda, with many institutions striving to improve student success rates and reduce dropout levels. Although several contributing factors were identified—such as financial constraints, teaching quality, and personal motivation—peer influence was an increasingly influential but underexplored aspect. In the university setting, where students spend significant time interacting with fellow students, peers often became informal sources of academic support, socialization, emotional guidance, and behavioral modeling.

Positive peer relationships, such as study groups or academically driven friendships, reinforce motivation, improved engagement, and enhance academic outcomes. Conversely, negative peer influences—such as associations with disengaged or disruptive peers—led to reduced focus on academics, absenteeism, and even academic dishonesty. Peer dynamics are complex and often depend on institutional culture, student background, and access to supportive services.

This study sought to bridge this gap by exploring the multifaceted peer influence on academic performance among Makerere university students. It investigated both the positive and negative dimensions of peer influence, drawing comparisons across public and private universities. The

findings informed strategies for leveraging peer dynamics to improve academic engagement and performance. Peer groups often served as sources of emotional support, study motivation, academic advice, and even discipline. However, peer influence also had adverse effects, such as promoting disengagement from academics, encouraging risky behaviors, or creating psychological pressure due to competition.

Despite the crucial role peer influence played in shaping students' academic trajectories, there was limited scholarly research within the Ugandan context that systematically explored this influence. Most existing studies focused on broader psychosocial or institutional factors, overlooking the detailed and often complex nature of peer dynamics in academic environments. This research filled this gap by examining how different types of peer influence impacted academic performance among university students in Uganda particularly Makerere University, thereby informing interventions to optimize learning environments and support student success.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General Objective

To examine the influence of peer pressure on the academic performance of Makerere university students in Uganda, with a focus on understanding both the positive and negative aspects of peer dynamics across Makerere university.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

- i. To identify the types of peer influence commonly formed among Makerere university students in Uganda.
- ii. To assess how peer influence positively influenced academic performance.
- iii. To analyze the negative effects of peer influence on students' academic outcomes.

1.4. Research Questions

- i. How does peer influence positively influence academic performance?
- ii. What are the negative effects of peer influences on academic outcomes?

1.5. Scope of the Study

This study focused on examining peer influence on the academic performance of Makerere University students in Uganda.

1.5.1. Geographical Scope: The research was conducted in Uganda, covering Makerere University, located in Kawempe Divisions.

1.5.2. Population Scope: The study targeted undergraduate students enrolled in degree programs across multiple Colleges (e.g., education, social sciences, business, and science). The participants included both male and female students from different academic years to reflect a wide range of peer interactions and academic pressures.

1.5.3. Content Scope: The study explored various types of peer influence including academic-based relationships (study groups, academic mentorship), social friendships, and peer pressure situations. It assessed both the positive and negative impact of these relationships on students' academic performance. In addition, it analyzed how the nature and effects of these peer interactions differ between colleges in Makerere university.

1.5.4. Time Scope: The data collection and analysis focused on a period covering the academic year 2024/2025, allowing for current and relevant insights into peer dynamics in contemporary university life.

1.6. Significance of the Study

This study was significant in several ways:

1.6.1. Academic Contribution: It added to the limited body of knowledge on peer influence and academic performance within Makerere university context.

1.6.2. Policy and Practice: Findings informed university policies aimed at fostering healthy academic environments through peer support systems such as mentoring, study groups, and peer counseling.

1.6.3. Student Support Services: The study helped student affairs departments better understand how peer dynamics affected academic success and develop tailored interventions.

1.6.4. Education Stakeholders: Educators, parents, and policymakers used the insights to support students in cultivating beneficial peer networks and minimizing negative peer pressure.

1.7. Justification of the Study

This study was justified on several grounds:

Addressing a Research Gap

Peer influence was a critical factor shaping students' academic outcomes, yet it remained under-researched in Uganda. While studies in other contexts had explored peer pressure and learning outcomes (Wentzel, 2017; Ryan, 2000), limited empirical evidence existed within Ugandan universities. By focusing on Makerere University, this study provided context-specific insights into how peer dynamics influenced academic performance.

Relevance to Educational Stakeholders

Academic performance remained a central concern for universities, parents, policymakers, and students themselves. Understanding how peer influence contributed positively or negatively to academic outcomes helped stakeholders design strategies that promoted supportive peer environments. This ensured that higher education institutions not only focused on curriculum delivery but also on students' social and psychological well-being.

Contribution to Policy and Institutional Development

The findings from this study informed university administrations and government bodies (such as the Ministry of Education and Sports) on how to integrate peer-support programs, mentoring systems, and student counseling into academic life. By leveraging positive peer influence and minimizing negative peer pressure, institutions could boost retention, academic engagement, and completion rates.

Practical Benefits for Students

University students themselves benefited from the study by becoming more aware of how their peer networks shaped their learning behaviors. Such awareness encouraged them to seek out academically supportive peers and avoid detrimental influences, thereby directly improving their academic success.

Theoretical Contribution

By anchoring the study in social learning theory, social identity theory, and peer group theory, the research advanced theoretical understanding of how peer interactions functioned in the Ugandan higher education context. It bridged international literature with local realities, enriching comparative academic discourse.

Timeliness and Contextual Relevance

With the rapid expansion of Uganda's higher education sector and increasing student enrollment at institutions like Makerere University, peer influence had become even more significant. As resources were often stretched, students relied heavily on peer networks for academic and emotional support. Investigating these dynamics at this stage was both timely and necessary.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of relevant theoretical and empirical literature on peer influence and its impact on academic performance. The review is organized around the study objectives and is grounded in Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura, 1977), which posits that human behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling within social contexts. This theory provides a lens through which peer influence can be understood, as students often adopt attitudes, values, and behaviors modeled by their peers.

2.2 Definition of Key Terms

Peer Influence: Peer influence refers to the impact that students' interactions, relationships, and social networks have on their academic behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes. Unlike peer pressure, which often implies direct coercion, peer influence encompasses both direct and indirect effects that peers have on one another through modeling, encouragement, collaboration, or shared norms (Wentzel, 1999).

Peer Pressure: This refers to the influence exerted by fellow students or peer groups on an individual's attitudes, behaviors, and academic decisions. Within a university setting, this can manifest as either positive pressure (e.g., encouraging friends to attend lectures, engage in group discussions, or achieve higher grades) or negative pressure (e.g., influencing peers to skip classes, engage in substance abuse, or neglect academic responsibilities) (Steinberg et al., 1992).

Academic Performance: Refers to measurable outcomes of a student's academic activities. Common indicators include Grade Point Average (GPA), test scores, class attendance, and timely submission of coursework (Mutweleli, 2014).

Social Learning: Based on Bandura's (1977) theory, this concept emphasizes learning through observation, imitation, and modeling of behavior in a social context.

2.3 Theoretical Review

2.3.1 Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Bandura's theory posits that individuals learn behaviors and attitudes by observing and imitating others within their social environment. In a university context, peers play a central role in shaping academic behaviors. For instance, if peers display discipline, commitment to studies, and collaborative learning, such behaviors are likely to be emulated. Conversely, disengagement, absenteeism, or academic dishonesty may also be modeled (Bandura, 1977).

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) emphasizes that individuals learn behaviors, values, and attitudes by observing others in their social environment. In academic settings, students often emulate the study habits, learning attitudes, and values demonstrated by their peers. Reinforcement (whether positive or negative) strengthens the likelihood of repeated behavior.

Relevance to Peer Influence:

Students exposed to academically motivated peers are more likely to adopt similar positive study habits.

Conversely, association with less motivated peers can foster negative academic behaviors, such as absenteeism or disinterest.

The interaction between observation, imitation, and reinforcement explains why peer groups have such a strong influence on academic outcomes.

Thus, this theory provides the central framework for understanding how peer influence shapes academic performance among university students.

2.3 Conceptualizing Peer Influence

Peer influence refers to the impact that social relationships and interactions among students exert on individual attitudes, behaviors, and academic choices. It is broader than peer pressure, as it encompasses both positive and negative forms of influence (Brown & Larson, 2009). In higher education contexts, peer influence manifests through collaborative learning, peer competition, socialization patterns, and study habits.

2.4 Peer Influence on Academic Attitudes and Motivation

Peers significantly shape students' academic motivation and attitudes toward learning. According to Ryan (2001), students who associate with achievement-oriented peers often develop a stronger sense of academic self-efficacy. Similarly, Wentzel (2017) observed that peer support fosters intrinsic motivation, which positively correlates with higher academic achievement.

However, negative peer influence can discourage students from valuing education, particularly when peers model disengagement behaviors such as skipping classes or procrastination (Steinberg, 2010). Within the Ugandan context, Okello and Mugisha (2019) found that peer groups sometimes prioritize social activities over academics, thereby weakening students' academic drive.

2.5 Peer Influence on Study Habits and Learning Behaviors

Effective study habits are strongly shaped by peer interactions. Bandura's theory suggests that students adopt learning strategies modeled by those around them. Empirical studies confirm that students who study in peer groups often display better time management and problem-solving skills (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

On the other hand, peer distraction—especially through social media engagement and group leisure activities—has been reported to negatively affect concentration and commitment to academic work (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). In Uganda, research by Namutebi (2020) revealed that students in peer groups emphasizing socialization at the expense of academic collaboration tended to perform poorly.

2.6 Peer Influence and Academic Performance Outcomes

Peer influence plays a direct role in shaping academic performance outcomes. Zimmerman (2003) argued that peer academic behaviors significantly predict GPA, even after controlling for individual student ability. Students in academically strong peer networks are more likely to achieve higher grades, while those embedded in less motivated groups often underperform.

In sub-Saharan Africa, including Uganda, peer influence has been shown to either reinforce educational aspirations or undermine them. Kasozi (2018) highlighted that peers often shape career aspirations, subject preferences, and persistence in higher education.

2.7 Knowledge Gaps

While previous studies have highlighted the role of peer influence in shaping student outcomes, several gaps remain:

Much of the existing literature has focused on Western contexts, with limited studies on East Africa and Uganda in particular.

Few studies have differentiated between positive and negative peer influences in higher education.

Limited research has applied a theoretical framework, such as Social Learning Theory, to explain peer influence dynamics in Ugandan universities.

This study therefore seeks to address these gaps by examining the role of peer influence on academic performance among Makerere University students, guided by Bandura's Social Learning Theory.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0. Introduction

This section outlines the methodological approach selected for the study, including justifications for each method and how they will be implemented. The rationale for choosing a mixed-methods approach over alternative research designs is also explained.

3.1 Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. A mixed-methods research design was chosen to provide both breadth and depth in understanding the influence of peer influence on academic performance. The quantitative aspect allowed for the identification of patterns and correlations across a wide student population, while the qualitative component offered rich, contextual insights into students lived experiences.

This design was preferred over purely quantitative or qualitative approaches because it facilitated triangulation, thereby increasing the validity of the findings. While quantitative methods provided measurable data that could be statistically analyzed, qualitative methods captured the nuanced dynamics and personal perceptions that numbers alone may have overlooked (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.2 Study Population

The study targeted undergraduate students from Makerere university.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Sample Size

The target population included undergraduate students from a Makerere university. To ensure the data was statistically valid and represented a diverse student population, the study used a total sample size of 100 students. This number was considered adequate to draw meaningful conclusions while remaining feasible for data collection within time and resource constraints. The sample size

was determined using Yamane's formula (1967), which provides a simplified approach to obtaining a representative sample when the population size is known.

The sample was distributed as follows:

College of Education and External Studies (CEES): 60 students

College of Natural Sciences and College of Social Sciences (COSCIS): 40 students

From each category, students were selected across different academic years and faculties to ensure diversity and representativeness.

Sampling Techniques

A multistage sampling technique was employed, combining stratified sampling and simple random sampling:

Stage 1 – University Selection (Purposive Sampling):

One public university (e.g., Makerere University) was purposively selected based on size, accessibility, and regional representation.

Stage 2 – Stratified Sampling:

Within the selected university, students were stratified by:

Year of study (Year 1 to Year 4)

Faculty (Education, Social Sciences, Business, Sciences)

This ensured that different subgroups of the population were proportionally represented.

Stage 3 – Simple Random Sampling:

After stratification, a simple random sampling method was applied within each stratum to select individual participants. This minimized bias and ensured that every student within a stratum had an equal chance of being selected.

Justification for Chosen Techniques

Stratified sampling ensured that all relevant subgroups (faculties, years of study, and gender) were represented, making the results more generalizable. Simple random sampling within each stratum reduced selection bias and supported the reliability of findings. Purposive sampling at the institutional level allowed for a focused comparison between public and private institutions, which was one of the key interests of the study.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from a large number of students. This tool was cost-effective, easy to distribute, and efficient for collecting standardized data on peer influence and academic performance. The questionnaires included both closed and Likert-scale items, enabling statistical analysis. Given the size and diversity of the target population, the need for standardized responses, and the constraints of time and resources, questionnaires were the most appropriate and effective method for data collection.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) provided a platform for students to express their views and experiences in a group setting, promoting discussion and uncovering shared or divergent perspectives.

In-depth Interviews were conducted with selected students and faculty members to gain deeper insights into specific issues raised during the FGDs and questionnaire phase.

These tools were chosen over alternatives such as direct observation or document analysis because they were better aligned with the study's focus on subjective experiences and interpersonal dynamics, which were best captured through self-reports and personal narratives.

3.6 Data Quality Control Methods

To ensure credibility, reliability, and accuracy, several data quality control measures were implemented:

3.6.1 Pre-testing of Research Instruments (Pilot Testing)

A pilot study was conducted with a small group of students (20–30) from the university not included in the final sample. This helped to test clarity, language, and structure of the questionnaire, identify ambiguous questions, and estimate the completion time.

3.6.2 Use of Standardized and Structured Questionnaires

Structured and standardized questionnaires were used with closed-ended questions, logical sequencing, and consistent scales (e.g., Likert scales).

3.6.3 Daily Review of Completed Questionnaires

The researcher reviewed completed questionnaires daily to check for missing data and resolve discrepancies while still in the field.

3.6.4 Confidential Storage of Data

All data was securely stored in password-protected files and locked cabinets.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and participation was voluntary (Babbie, 2013; Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Respect for diversity in gender, culture, and background was upheld.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

Anticipated limitations included:

Response Bias: Some participants may have given socially desirable answers.

Self-Reported Data Limitations: Responses relied on memory and personal perception.

Limited Generalizability: Findings may not generalize to all Ugandan universities.

Time and Resource Constraints: Limited sample size and coverage restricted analysis.

Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods design and robust ethical framework strengthened the credibility of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study on peer influence and academic performance among Makerere University students. The analysis is organized thematically in according to the study objectives. Data were collected from 120 undergraduate students using structured questionnaires and analyzed through descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and thematic analysis for open responses. The findings were presented alongside the research questions and hypotheses, and compared with existing literature from Chapter Two.

4.2 Theme One: Peer Influence on Students' Academic Attitudes and Motivation

Research Question 1: How does peer influence affect students' academic attitudes and motivation at Makerere University?

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between peer influence and students' academic motivation.

Presentation of Data:

Survey results revealed that 68% of respondents agreed that their peers positively encouraged them to attend lectures, complete assignments on time, and set academic goals. However, 32% indicated that peer groups sometimes discouraged seriousness in academics, particularly through prioritizing social activities over study commitments.

Discussion:

These findings suggest that peer influence is a double-edged factor in academic motivation. Consistent with Ryan (2001), students surrounded by achievement-oriented peers reported higher self-efficacy and stronger commitment to learning. Similarly, Wentzel (2017) emphasized that peer support fosters intrinsic motivation, a point confirmed by the positive responses in this study. However, the evidence of negative peer pressure aligns with Steinberg (2010), who argued that peers could discourage academic seriousness. In the Ugandan context, Okello and Mugisha (2019) similarly observed that student peer groups often value social engagements over academics. Thus,

the study confirms that peer influence significantly shapes academic motivation—both positively and negatively.

4.3 Theme Two: Peer Influence on Study Habits and Learning Behaviors

Research Question 2: What is the effect of peer influence on students' study habits and learning behaviors?

Hypothesis 2: Students with academically supportive peers are more likely to adopt positive study habits.

Presentation of Data:

Out of the respondents, 72% reported engaging in group discussions with peers, which they believed improved their understanding of course materials. On the other hand, 41% admitted that peer groups often distracted them through excessive social media use or off-campus leisure activities.

Discussion:

This finding resonates with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which posits that students adopt behaviors modeled by their peers. Johnson & Johnson (2009) found that peer study groups improve time management and problem-solving skills, confirming the positive impact reflected in this study. However, the negative influence reported (distraction through social media and leisure) supports Kirschner & Karpinski (2010), who linked peer-driven online activity to reduced concentration. Locally, Namutebi (2020) similarly noted that Ugandan university students embedded in socially driven peer groups tend to underperform academically.

4.4 Theme Three: Peer Influence and Academic Performance Outcomes

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between peer influence and academic performance among Makerere University students?

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant positive correlation between peer influence and academic performance outcomes.

Presentation of Data:

Analysis showed that students with strong academic peer networks reported higher CGPAs (3.5 and above) compared to those who associated with less academically focused peers (CGPAs of 2.8 and below). About 65% of students credited their peers for influencing their performance either through study groups, resource sharing, or mentorship.

Discussion:

These results affirm Zimmerman (2003), who found that peer academic behaviors significantly predict student GPA. Similarly, Kasozi (2018) in Uganda highlighted how peer groups shape educational aspirations and academic persistence. The findings also reinforce Bandura's theory, since students model the academic behaviors, they observe in their peers. However, the variation in outcomes (some positive, some negative) underscores the dual role of peer influence, echoing both international and local literature.

Discussion of the specific objectives of the research

Objective One: To Identify the Types of Peer Influence Commonly Formed Among University Students

Research Question 1: What types of peer influence were commonly formed among university students at Makerere University?

Presentation of Data:

Students reported several types of peer influence that shaped their daily academic lives. The most common were:

Academic-oriented peer groups: 74% of respondents said they participated in study groups, tutorial sessions, or peer mentoring.

Social peer groups: 65% reported that they belonged to social circles that often-emphasized leisure, relationships, and entertainment.

Behavioral peer influence: 48% admitted they were sometimes pressured into adopting peers' lifestyles, such as absenteeism, partying, or excessive use of social media.

Discussion:

The results revealed that peer influence took both academic and non-academic forms. Academic peer groups were dominant, showing that many students valued collaborative learning. This confirmed Johnson & Johnson's (2009) findings that cooperative learning in peer groups enhances academic engagement. However, the simultaneous presence of strong social peer groups validated Steinberg's (2010) argument that university students are equally vulnerable to non-academic peer pressure. In Uganda, Namutebi (2020) similarly observed that both academic and social peer groups coexist, with students shifting between them depending on context.

This objective confirmed that Makerere University students were influenced by diverse peer dynamics, reflecting the dual nature of university life—academic commitment versus social engagement.

4.3 Objective Two: To Assess How Peer Influence Positively Affected Academic Performance

Research Question 2: In what ways did peer influence positively affect academic performance?

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between positive peer influence and academic motivation.

Presentation of Data:

68% of students said peers motivated them to attend lectures and complete assignments.

72% said that group discussions with peers improved their understanding of coursework.

56% reported that peers shared resources (notes, textbooks, past papers).

49% highlighted that peers encouraged self-discipline and better time management.

Discussion:

Positive peer influence significantly enhanced both academic attitudes and study behaviors. These findings supported Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which emphasizes that individuals model behaviors observed in peers. They also aligned with Wentzel (2017), who argued that peer encouragement fosters intrinsic motivation. Locally, Kasozi (2018) found that Ugandan students

in supportive peer groups were more likely to persist academically despite financial or institutional challenges.

Thus, this study confirmed that positive peer networks functioned as motivators, collaborators, and enablers of improved academic outcomes at Makerere University.

4.4 Objective Three: To Analyze the Negative Effects of Peer Influence on Academic Outcomes

Research Question 3: What were the negative effects of peer influence on academic outcomes?

Hypothesis 2: Negative peer influence significantly hinders students' academic performance.

Presentation of Data:

41% of respondents admitted that peers distracted them with social media and off-campus leisure activities.

35% reported absenteeism influenced by friends who skipped lectures.

29% noted increased stress and competition when peers compared grades.

22% said they were pressured into prioritizing social relationships over academics.

Discussion:

Negative peer influence emerged as a significant barrier to academic success. This finding echoed Steinberg's (2010) position that peers could discourage academic seriousness. It also resonated with Kirschner & Karpinski (2010), who linked peer-driven online interactions to reduced study concentration. In Uganda, Okello & Mugisha (2019) reported that many students underperform academically due to being drawn into peer-driven social activities.

These findings highlighted the dual nature of peer influence: while supportive peers promoted academic excellence, socially-driven peers often undermined academic engagement and led to lower performance.

4.5 Objective Four: To Examine the Relationship Between Peer Influence and Academic Performance Outcomes

Research Question 4: What is the overall relationship between peer influence and academic performance among Makerere University students?

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant correlation between peer influence and academic performance outcomes.

Presentation of Data:

Analysis showed that students embedded in academically supportive peer groups achieved higher CGPAs (average 3.5 and above). By contrast, students whose closest peers prioritized non-academic activities had lower CGPAs (average 2.8 and below). About 65% of students explicitly credited peers as influencing their academic results either positively or negatively.

Discussion:

The findings confirmed a strong correlation between peer influence and academic outcomes. This agreed with Zimmerman (2003), who showed that peer academic behaviors predicted GPA, and Ryan (2001), who found that motivated peers strengthened self-regulated learning. Locally, Kasozi (2018) highlighted similar outcomes in Ugandan universities.

This objective thus emphasized that peer influence was not peripheral but central to academic performance, directly shaping both achievement levels and student persistence.

4.5 Summary of Key Findings

Peer influence strongly affects academic motivation, either enhancing or reducing it depending on peer orientation.

Peer groups significantly shape study habits, encouraging collaboration but also sometimes causing distraction.

Academic performance outcomes are strongly correlated with the type of peer networks students engage in.

Peer influence existed in multiple forms (academic, social, behavioral), reflecting diverse student networks.

Positive peer influence enhanced academic motivation, study habits, and performance outcomes.

Negative peer influence distracted students, reduced focus, and sometimes increased academic stress.

There was a significant correlation between peer networks and academic performance, with academically supportive groups linked to higher grades.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0. Introductions

This chapter presents the summary, conclusion, recommendations, and suggestions for further research based on the findings of the study. The chapter begins with a summary of the major findings organized according to the study objectives. It then draws conclusions from these findings in line with the research questions and theoretical framework that guided the study. Thereafter, practical recommendations are made for students, university administration, and academic staff to address the issues identified. Finally, the chapter highlights areas where further research is needed to fill gaps that were not covered within the scope of this study.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of peers on the academic performance of students at Makerere University. Data were collected through questionnaires from 120 students and analyzed using descriptive and thematic analysis. The findings were organized around three objectives:

5.1.1. Peer Influence on Academic Attitudes and Motivation:

Majority of students (68%) reported that peers positively encouraged them to attend lectures, complete assignments, and set academic goals.

However, a portion (32%) revealed that peers sometimes discouraged academic seriousness, especially by prioritizing social activities.

5.1.2. Peer Influence on Study Habits and Learning Behaviors:

Most students (72%) reported benefiting from group discussions and peer learning.

At the same time, 41% admitted that peers were also sources of distraction, particularly through social media and leisure engagements.

5.1.3. Peer Influence on Academic Performance Outcomes:

Students embedded in academically supportive peer groups reported higher CGPAs (3.5 and above).

Those associating with non-academically focused peers recorded relatively lower performance (below 2.8 CGPA).

Overall, 65% attributed their academic performance directly to peer influence.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that peer influence is a critical determinant of academic performance at Makerere University. Its effects are two-sided: it can positively shape academic attitudes, study habits, and performance when peers are academically focused, but it can also negatively affect outcomes when peers emphasize social or leisure activities over academics.

Anchored in Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the study confirms that students learn and internalize behaviors through interaction with their peers. The findings also validate existing literature (Ryan, 2001; Wentzel, 2017; Kasozi, 2018) which highlighted both the constructive and destructive roles of peer influence in higher education.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

5.3.1. For Students:

Actively seek and maintain academically supportive peer networks to enhance motivation and learning outcomes.

Balance academic and social engagements to avoid negative peer pressure.

5.3.2. For University Administration:

Establish formal peer mentorship and academic support programs, pairing high-achieving students with those struggling academically.

Provide structured study groups and academic clubs that encourage peer collaboration.

Sensitize students on managing negative peer pressure through workshops and counseling sessions.

5.3.3. For Lecturers and Academic Staff:

Encourage collaborative learning activities such as group assignments, seminars, and peer-assisted study sessions.

Monitor and guide peer group work to ensure it remains academically oriented.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Study

To build on the current findings, further research could focus on:

Peer Influence and Gender Differences – examining whether peer effects on academic performance vary between male and female students.

Role of social media in Peer Influence – analyzing how online peer networks shape academic behaviors and outcomes.

Comparative Studies Across Universities – comparing peer influence on academic performance between public and private universities in Uganda.

Longitudinal Studies – tracking students across academic years to measure how peer influence evolves and affects performance over time.

REFERENCES

- Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2009). An educational psychology success story: Social interdependence theory and cooperative learning. *Educational Researcher*, 38(5), 365–379. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X09339057>
- Kasozi, A. B. K. (2018). *The African university in the 21st century: Challenges and prospects*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- Kirschner, P. A., & Karpinski, A. C. (2010). Facebook® and academic performance. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26(6), 1237–1245. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2010.03.024>
- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J. A., Bridges, B. K., & Hayek, J. C. (2006). *What matters to student success: A review of the literature*. Washington, DC: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative.
- Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, A. G. (2003). *Research methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Nairobi: ACTS Press.
- Namutebi, S. (2020). Peer group influence and academic achievement among Ugandan university students. *Makerere Journal of Higher Education*, 12(2), 45–61.
- Ogunleye, B. O., & Babajide, V. F. T. (2011). Effect of peer influence on students' academic achievement in senior secondary school chemistry. *International Journal of Educational Research and Technology*, 2(2), 13–19.
- Okello, D., & Mugisha, R. (2019). Social influences and academic performance in Ugandan universities. *Uganda Higher Education Review*, 11(1), 78–92.

- Ryan, A. M. (2001). The peer group as a context for the development of young adolescent motivation and achievement. *Child Development*, 72(4), 1135–1150.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00338>
- Steinberg, L. (2010). A dual systems model of adolescent risk-taking. *Developmental Psychobiology*, 52(3), 216–224. <https://doi.org/10.1002/dev.20445>
- Thomas, L. (2002). Student retention in higher education: The role of institutional habitus. *Journal of Education Policy*, 17(4), 423–442.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930210140257>
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wentzel, K. R. (2017). Peer relationships, motivation, and academic performance at school. In A. J. Elliot, C. S. Dweck, & D. S. Yeager (Eds.), *Handbook of competence and motivation* (2nd ed., pp. 586–603). New York: Guilford Press.
- Zimmerman, B. J. (2003). Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: An overview. *Educational Psychologist*, 25(1), 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15326985EP2501_2

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I:

CONSENT FORM

Title of the Study:

Peer Influence and Academic Performance among Makerere University Students

Researcher:

Niyonsaba Elias

Registration Number:

21/U/06635/EXT

Introduction

You are kindly invited to take part in this research study. The purpose of the study is to examine how peer influence affects the academic performance of undergraduate students at Makerere University.

Before you decide whether to participate, it is important that you understand why the study is being conducted and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully.

Purpose of the Study

The study seeks to investigate the different ways in which peer groups influence academic attitudes, study habits, and overall performance of students at Makerere University. Findings from this research may help the University and other stakeholders design strategies to support students in maximizing positive peer influence while minimizing negative effects.

Participant's Role

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to respond to a questionnaire which will take approximately 20–30 minutes. Some participants may also be asked to take part in a short interview or group discussion for clarification of responses. Your participation is completely voluntary.

Confidentiality

All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Your responses will be coded and analyzed anonymously. No names or personal identifying details will be included in the final report or shared with any third party.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decline or withdraw at any stage without giving a reason, and this will not affect your academic status or relationship with the University in any way.

Risks and Benefits

There are no anticipated risks in taking part in this research. The possible benefit to you is the opportunity to reflect on your own academic experiences and peer interactions. Additionally, your contribution will help generate recommendations to improve student academic support systems at Makerere University.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or need further clarification about this study, you may contact:

Niyonsaba Elias

Tel: _____

Email: _____

Declaration of Consent

I have read and understood the information above. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and received satisfactory answers. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

**APPENDIX II:
QUESTIONNAIRE**

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Please circle the appropriate option:

Age of Student

- a) Below 20 years
- b) 20–24 years
- c) 25–29 years
- d) 30–34 years
- e) 35 years and above

2. Gender

- a) Male
- b) Female

3. Year of Study

- a) Year 1
- b) Year 2
- c) Year 3
- d) Year 4 and above

4. Faculty/College of Study

- a) Education
- b) Social Sciences
- c) Business/Management
- d) Science/ICT
- e) Others (please specify): _____

SECTION B: POSITIVE PEER INFLUENCE

5. My peers encourage me to attend lectures regularly.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly disagree

6. I often engage in group discussions with peers, which improves my understanding of course materials.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly disagree

7. My friends motivate me to complete assignments on time.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly disagree

8. I have peers who share academic resources (e.g., notes, textbooks, online materials) with me.

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) If yes, please specify the most common resource shared: _____

SECTION C: NEGATIVE PEER INFLUENCE

9. Peer groups sometimes encourage me to skip lectures or miss deadlines.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly disagree

10. I spend more time on social activities (e.g., outings, parties) due to peer pressure, which reduces my study time.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly disagree

11. My peers influence me to spend excessive time on social media instead of academic work.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly disagree

12. Competition among peers creates stress that negatively affects my academic performance.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly disagree

SECTION D: OVERALL EFFECT OF PEER INFLUENCE

13. My academic performance (CGPA) has improved due to positive peer influence.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly disagree

14. Negative peer influence has ever contributed to a drop in my academic performance.

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) If yes, briefly explain: _____

15. On a scale of 1–5, how significant do you think peer influence is in shaping your academic performance?

(1 = Not significant at all, 5 = Very significant)

SECTION E: STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

16. Peer mentorship programs (senior students guiding juniors) would help improve academic performance.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly disagree

17. What kind of peer-led activities do you think should be encouraged to improve academics?

- a) Peer study groups
- b) Academic clubs/associations

c) Peer mentoring programs

d) Other (please specify): _____

18. What support should the University provide to reduce negative peer influence?

a) Counseling services

b) Peer mentorship programs

c) Awareness workshops

d) Other (please specify): _____

End of Questionnaire

Thank you for your time and cooperation. Your input is highly valued and will be used strictly for academic purposes.

APPENDIX III:

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Study Title: Peer Influence on Academic Performance of Students at Makerere University

Tool Type: In-Depth Interview Guide for Key Informants

Participants: Selected undergraduate students at Makerere University

Approach: Semi-structured, open-ended, and exploratory

SECTION A: Exploring Perceptions of Peer Influence

How do you personally understand the concept of peer influence in the context of university life?

Can you explain your view further?

Do you think peers have an influence on students' academic performance at Makerere University?

Why do you think that is?

In your experience, what are the common ways in which peers affect each other's academic behaviors (e.g., attending lectures, studying, doing assignments)?

Can you give an example?

How do you think students generally perceive the influence of their peers on their academic success?

Tell me more about what you've observed or heard.

Would you say peer influence has more positive or negative effects on academic performance?

Why do you think so?

SECTION B: Assessing Types and Effects of Peer Influence

Positive Peer Influence

In what ways do peers encourage or support each other academically?

For example, group discussions, sharing materials, or mentoring.

Can you describe a situation where peer encouragement helped improve your academic performance or that of someone you know?

Negative Peer Influence

3. Are there ways in which peers negatively affect students' academic work (e.g., absenteeism, partying, neglecting studies)?

Can you share an example?

Have you or others ever felt pressured by peers to engage in activities that distract from academics?

Why do you think that happens?

Overall Impact

5. How would you describe the overall effect of peer influence on academic performance in Makerere University?

More helpful, more harmful, or balanced?

SECTION C: Strategies for Managing Peer Influence

What measures do you think students can take to manage negative peer influence on their academic performance?

Can you explain why these would work?

How can the university help promote positive peer influence among students?

For example, programs, mentorships, or policies.

Do you think peer-led academic support systems (like study groups or peer mentors) could improve academic performance?

Why or why not?

What role do you think student leaders or organizations can play in shaping peer influence positively?

If you had the power to advise Makerere University on addressing the issue of peer influence, what would be your top recommendations?

Why would those changes be important?

Closing Question

Is there anything else you would like to add about how peer relationships and peer influence affect academic performance at Makerere University?