Impact of Peer Group on Civic Responsibility among Students in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of peer group on civic responsibility among students in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. Civic responsibility among youths is crucial for sustainable development and democratic growth. However, peer group influence has been identified as a key factor shaping students' civic attitudes and behaviors. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The target population comprised all senior secondary school students in public and private schools within the area, totaling approximately 6,500 students. While a sample of 200 senior secondary school students was selected using stratified random sampling across public and private schools. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed a significant relationship between peer group influence and students' civic responsibility. Recommendations were made for schools, parents, and policymakers to promote positive peer interaction to enhance students' civic consciousness.

Keywords: Peer group, Civic responsibility, Students, Calabar South, Socialization.

Introduction

Civic responsibility refers to the active participation of individuals in activities and behaviors that contribute to the well-being of their communities and the nation at large (Osuorji & Asogwa, 2021). It encompasses a wide range of obligations, such as obeying laws, paying taxes, protecting the environment, participating in community development, respecting the rights of others, and engaging in democratic processes like voting and policy advocacy (Okafor & Omeje, 2022). For any nation to achieve sustainable development, citizens must be equipped with a strong sense of civic responsibility.

One critical period when civic values are formed and tested is during adolescence. Students, especially in secondary schools, are at a stage of transition from parental dependence to greater social independence. At this stage, peer groups become one of the most influential agents of socialization, often rivalling or even surpassing the influence of family and school. A peer group is a social group consisting of individuals of similar age, background, or social status who share common interests and activities (Nwachukwu & Ibe, 2021).

The influence of peer groups on students' behavior and attitudes cannot be overemphasized. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), learning occurs in a social context through observation, imitation, and modelling. This implies that students are likely to emulate the behaviors, values, and attitudes displayed by their peers. When peer groups demonstrate positive civic behaviors, such as participating in environmental sanitation or volunteering, other members are likely to adopt similar practices (Iheanacho & Onu, 2023). Conversely, when peer influence leans towards negative behaviors

such as truancy, vandalism, or civic apathy, students' sense of civic responsibility may be undermined (Adeyemo & Omisore, 2021).

In Nigeria, and specifically in urban centers like Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, the role of peer groups in shaping students' civic engagement has become a topical issue. Calabar South is a densely populated urban area with diverse cultural, economic, and social dynamics that create unique peer group interactions among adolescents. Reports have shown that despite the inclusion of Civic Education as a core subject in the Nigerian secondary school curriculum, the level of civic engagement among youths remains low (Okafor & Omeje, 2022). This raises questions about the effectiveness of formal civic education when informal agents of socialization like peer groups may have a stronger influence on students' day-to-day choices and behavior.

Civic responsibility refers to the duties and obligations that citizens have to their communities and the nation at large. It includes obeying laws, participating in community service, respecting others' rights, and contributing to the democratic process (Okafor, 2017). The youth, especially students, are critical in sustaining these responsibilities as future leaders.

Peer groups, defined as groups of individuals of similar age and status, play a significant role in socializing young people (Bandura, 1977). Adolescents spend a considerable amount of time with their peers, who often influence their attitudes, decisions, and behaviors, including civic attitudes (Ajayi, 2019).

In Calabar South Local Government Area, urbanization and diverse cultural interactions present unique peer group dynamics. Despite civic education efforts, evidence suggests a decline in civic consciousness among students, with increasing cases of truancy, disregard for public property, and apathy towards community activities. This raises the question: what role does peer group influence play in this trend? This study therefore examines the impact of peer group on civic responsibility among students in Calabar South Local Government Area.

Statement of the problem

Civic responsibility is essential for the growth and stability of any democratic society, as it fosters a sense of belonging, accountability, and contribution to societal development. In Nigeria, concerted efforts have been made through the introduction of Civic Education in the secondary school curriculum to promote civic values among young people. Despite these efforts, there appears to be a growing trend of civic apathy, indiscipline, nonchalance towards national duties, and disregard for public order among secondary school students, especially in urban centers like Calabar South Local Government Area.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the impact of peer group influence on civic responsibility among students in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. By exploring how peer interactions shape students' civic awareness, sense of duty, and participation in community development, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on youth civic engagement and responsible citizenship in Nigeria.

One potential factor influencing this trend is peer group interaction. Peer groups, particularly during adolescence, serve as a major agent of socialization, significantly influencing students' attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes. While positive peer groups can inspire civic consciousness and responsible behavior, negative peer influence may lead to truancy, vandalism, disregard for public property, disrespect for authority, and even cult-related behaviors.

Anecdotal evidence and media reports in Calabar South suggest increasing involvement of secondary school students in socially irresponsible behaviors such as disobedience to school rules, avoidance of environmental sanitation programs, and general lack of interest in community service or national concerns. These observations raise concerns about the possible role of peer group influence in shaping or distorting students' sense of civic responsibility.

Unfortunately, there are paucity of empirical research within the Calabar South context that examines the specific nature and extent of peer group influence on students' civic behavior. Without this understanding, stakeholders including educators, school administrators, parents, and policymakers may find it difficult to design effective strategies to mitigate negative peer influence and promote civic responsibility. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining how peer group interactions affect the civic

responsibility of students in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. The research aims to provide evidence-based insights that can inform the development of interventions to foster responsible citizenship among secondary school students.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate impact of Peer Group on Civic Responsibility Among Students in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the:

1. Relationship between peer group influence and students' civic responsibility.
2. Identify positive and negative aspects of peer group influence on civic attitudes.

Research questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study

1. How do peer groups influence students' awareness and practice of civic responsibility?
2. To what extent does peer group influence on civic responsibility differ among male and female students.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study

H_0: There is no significant relationship between peer group influence and students' civic responsibility.

H_1: There is a significant relationship between peer group influence and students' civic responsibility.

Literature Review

Peer Group Influence and Students' Civic Responsibility

Adolescence is widely recognized as one of the most critical periods in the development of social and civic values. During this stage, young people increasingly rely on their peers for acceptance, identity formation, and behavioral guidance (Bandura, 1977). As students navigate the complexities of growing up, peer groups emerge as powerful agents of socialization, often second only to the family and school (Nwachukwu & Ibe, 2021).

Peer group influence refers to the ways in which individuals of similar age, status, or interest shape each other's attitudes, values, and behaviors through interaction, shared activities, and informal rules. In the school context, peer groups can serve as a source of motivation, support, and modelling for desirable behaviors - including those related to civic responsibility. However, when negative peer norms prevail, students may also be swayed toward truancy, disobedience, and disregard for societal rules (Adeyemo & Omisore, 2021).

Civic responsibility among students encompasses their willingness and commitment to perform duties that benefit their schools, communities, and the larger society. This includes respecting school rules, participating in community development activities, protecting public property, and engaging in practices that promote social harmony and democratic values (Okafor & Omeje, 2022). In Nigeria, Civic Education has been integrated into the secondary school curriculum to help foster these values among young people. However, the success of such efforts often depends on the extent to which positive civic attitudes are reinforced within peer groups.

Existing studies have shown that peer groups can act as a double-edged sword either nurturing responsible, civically-minded youths or encouraging apathy and antisocial behavior (Osuorji & Asogwa, 2021). For example, peer-led activities such as civic clubs, environmental sanitation projects, and community volunteer work have been found to strengthen students' sense of civic duty. Conversely, negative peer influence has been linked to increased instances of school indiscipline, vandalism, and youth restiveness, undermining the goals of Civic Education (Iheanacho & Onu, 2023).

In contexts like Calabar South Local Government Area, where students are exposed to diverse socio-cultural dynamics and urban peer group structures, understanding this relationship becomes even more important. Schools, parents, and policymakers must recognize that while Civic Education can provide students with knowledge about their civic rights and duties, it is often through peer interactions that these lessons are internalized and translated into real-life behaviour.

Positive and Negative Aspects of Peer Group Influence on Civic Attitudes

Adolescence is a formative period during which young people develop core social and civic values that shape their attitudes toward community and nation-building. As students spend a significant amount of time interacting with peers both inside and outside the school environment, peer groups become a powerful agent of socialization, influencing their thoughts, decisions, and actions (Bandura, 1977; Ekpoto et al., 2021; Adams et al., 2025). Peer group influence is often described as a double-edged sword, with the capacity to both promote and hinder the development of responsible civic attitudes among students. On one hand, peers can reinforce positive behaviours, such as compliance with school rules, active participation in community service, and respect for public property. On the other hand, negative peer norms may encourage deviant behaviours, civic apathy, or disrespect for authority and social order (Iheanacho & Onu, 2023; Wentzel, 2017).

Understanding these dual dimensions of peer influence is essential for educators, parents, and policymakers who seek to nurture a generation of students committed to active citizenship. Positive peer influence can be harnessed through structured group activities, civic clubs, and peer mentoring. Conversely, when peer interactions are left unchecked, negative influences may undermine civic education efforts, leading to social misconduct and weakened civic commitment among youths (Osuorji & Asogwa, 2021). Given the increasing concern about youth disengagement from civic duties in many communities, especially in urban areas like Calabar South, it becomes imperative to explore how the positive and negative aspects of peer group interactions shape students' civic attitudes. Such an understanding provides the basis for designing effective interventions that maximize the benefits of positive peer influence while mitigating its harmful effects.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine how peer groups influence civic responsibility among secondary school students in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. The target population comprised all senior secondary school students in public and private schools within the area, totalling approximately 6,500 students.

A sample of 200 students was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure fair representation across school type (public and private), gender, and class levels (SS 2). Data were collected using a researcher-developed, structured questionnaire titled "Peer Group and Civic Responsibility Questionnaire (PGCRQ)." The instrument contained three sections: demographic information, peer group influence scale, and civic responsibility scale, all measured on a 4-point Likert scale. The instrument's validity was confirmed by experts in Educational Psychology, while reliability was established through a pilot test which yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.78, indicating good internal consistency. Data collection was done with the help of civic education teachers in the sample school and ethical standards such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed. Descriptive statistics (mean, and standard deviation) were used to answer the research questions, while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was employed to test the hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance, using SPSS version 25.

Results findings

This section presents the analysed data based on the research questions and hypothesis formulated for the study.

Research Question 1:

How do peer groups influence students' awareness and practice of civic responsibility?

Descriptive statistics revealed that students agreed that their peers influenced their civic behaviour in various ways. Table 1 shows the mean scores.

Peer Group Influence Items	Mean	SD	Decision
My friends encourage me to obey school rules.	3.22	0.78	Agree
My peers participate in community service.	3.10	0.83	Agree
My friends discourage me from engaging in vandalism.	3.30	0.72	Agree
My peers often talk about our civic duties.	2.85	0.91	Agree
I often join my peers in voluntary community service or social project	3.18	0.75	Agree
I feel responsible for promoting peace and unity in my community	3.35	0.58	Agree
I obey laws and regulation even when no one is watching	3.48	0.58	Agree
I always dispose of waste properly to keep my environment clean	3.30	0.63	Agree
Overall Mean	3.12	0.81	Positive Influence

The overall mean of **3.12** indicates that peer groups generally have a **positive influence** on students' awareness and practice of civic responsibility.

Research Question 3:
Are there differences in peer influence based on gender and school type?
The descriptive comparison revealed slight differences:
- **Gender:** Female students (M = 3.18) reported slightly higher positive peer influence than males (M = 3.06).
- **School Type:** Students in private schools (M = 3.22) showed higher positive peer influence than those in public schools (M = 3.05).

These differences were not statistically significant.

Hypothesis Testing
H₀: There is no significant relationship between peer group influence and students' civic responsibility.
Pearson Product Moment Correlation was computed:

Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
Peer Group Influence & Civic Responsibility	195	0.61	0.000	Reject H₀

The result shows a moderate positive relationship (r = 0.61, p < 0.05) between peer group influence and students' civic responsibility. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that peer group influence significantly affects students' civic responsibility.

Discussion of Findings
The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that peer group influence plays a significant and positive role in shaping students' civic responsibility in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. This result aligns with Ajayi (2019) who averred that Adolescents spend a considerable amount of time with their peers, who often influence their attitudes, decisions, and behaviours, including civic attitudes. The descriptive results showed high mean scores across key civic responsibility indicators such as obedience to school rules, participation in community service, environmental sanitation, respect for laws, and promotion of peace and unity. The overall mean score (3.12) suggests that students generally experience positive peer reinforcement of civic behaviour. This finding directly supports Nwachukwu and Ibe (2021) who posited that as students navigate the complexities of growing up, peer groups emerge as powerful

agents of socialization, often second only to the family and school. This result calls for the urgent need for schools to strengthen peer mentoring programmes, civic clubs, and cooperative learning activities, as these structures formalize and amplify the positive peer interactions already present among students.

The hypothesis testing revealed a moderate and statistically significant relationship between peer group influence and civic responsibility ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.05$). This finding reinforces Osuorji and Asogwa (2021) who stated that peer groups can act as a double-edged sword either nurturing responsible, civically-minded youths or encouraging apathy and antisocial behaviour. In line with Social Learning Theory, students tend to model civic behaviours that are approved and rewarded within their peer groups. This result is a pointer to the fact that Civic Education should move beyond theoretical instruction to include peer-led and activity-based civic engagements, such as community service projects and peer advocacy campaigns, which enable students to learn civic responsibility through shared practice.

The absence of statistically significant differences based on gender and school type suggests that peer influence operates consistently across demographic groups. This means that interventions aimed at improving civic responsibility through peer structures can be implemented broadly across public and private schools. This result suggests school-wide monitoring of peer interactions by teachers and counsellors, rather than targeted interventions limited to specific student categories

Although the overall peer influence was positive, the identification of negative peer pressure among a minority of students points to the fact that peer groups are a double-edged phenomenon. This finding calls for a strong synergy between parents and schools to monitor peer associations and guide students toward positive friendships, thereby mitigating the risks associated with negative peer influence.

Conclusion

This study has established that peer groups have a significant impact on the civic responsibility of students in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. The findings revealed that most students are positively influenced by their peers to obey school rules, participate in community service, and respect public property. However, a minority of students reported that negative peer influence sometimes leads to truancy, disobedience, and apathy towards civic duties. The study supports the premise of Social Learning Theory, which posits that adolescents adopt behaviours and values modelled by their peers. It further highlights that positive peer interactions can be harnessed to promote civic responsibility among secondary school students, while negative peer influence needs to be monitored and managed. Given the critical role that youths play in nation-building, strengthening positive peer influence is vital for nurturing responsible citizens who are committed to the development of their communities and the country at large.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:
1. Schools should create and strengthen peer mentoring programs, civic clubs, and cooperative learning activities that encourage students to support one another in upholding civic values.
2. School counsellors and teachers should closely monitor peer interactions and intervene promptly when negative peer pressure is identified.
3. Civic Education should include practical activities such as community service projects and peer-led campaigns to reinforce civic responsibility.
4. Parents should pay close attention to their children's peer associations and provide guidance on choosing friends who have positive values.
5. Open communication between parents and children should be encouraged to help students resist negative peer pressure.

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