

Peer Support Networks As Predictors For Students' Academic Well-Being In Ethiope East Lga

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Abstract

This study investigated peer support networks as predictors for students' academic well-being in Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State. The study utilized a correlational research design to investigate three objectives, research questions, and hypotheses. The study's population was 20,235 students from senior secondary schools in the study area, with a sample size of 377 students selected using stratified random sampling techniques. The Peer Support Networks and Students' Academic Well-being Questionnaire (PSNSAWQ), comprised of the Peer Support Networks Survey (PSS) and the Academic Well-being Survey (AWS), were utilized to collect the required data for the study. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer and test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The study's results indicated that social skills clubs, debating societies, and subject-based clubs had a significant positive correlation with students' academic well-being. The research concluded that joining clubs and groups that encourage socializing and learning can help students do better in school in the specific region. The study recommended among others that; the management of secondary schools should prioritize the establishment and support of social skills clubs to enhance students' social interactions and academic well-being in the study area.

Keywords: *Peer, Support, Networks, Predictors, Academic, Well-being.*

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I. Introduction

In recent times, people have become increasingly worried over the declining academic well-being of students in Nigerian public schools, due to various factors such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources, lack of qualified teachers, a lack of academic support systems, and high levels of poverty, among others. Despite efforts to improve the education system, through various government and non-governmental initiatives. The difficulties still exist and are affecting the education quality in public schools (Atakpo, 2024). As a result, prioritising and addressing these issues has become more critical than ever in order to ensure that students in Nigerian public schools receive the quality education they deserve. Sustainable Development Goal is focused on providing accessible and fair education of high quality for all individuals. This has become critical because the country's future progress and prosperity are dependent on it. To ensure that this goal is met, stakeholders at all levels must collaborate to support initiatives that encourage students' peer learning support networks.

In the late 80s and early 90s, extracurricular activities in secondary schools became increasingly popular as students sought ways to enhance their academic performance and develop new skills. This trend fuelled the formation of various clubs and organizations, ranging from academic clubs to sports teams, which provided students with opportunities for personal growth and social interaction. Students were able to explore their interests outside of the classroom and build relationships with peers who shared similar passions (Bakircioğlu, 2016). In the present day, peer support networks play a crucial role in fostering personal growth and social development among students. These groups, made up of individuals who have shared experiences or backgrounds, offer emotional, social, and practical support to one another, ultimately creating a strong sense of community and belonging within the school environment (Apeh & Nteh, 2020).

The peer support network was described by Menzies and Baron (2014) as a valuable resource for individuals to share experiences, offer advice, and receive encouragement from others who have similar lived

experiences. This type of support can foster a sense of empowerment and resilience among members, leading to positive outcomes in mental health and personal growth (Atakpo, 2020). These networks have been shown to enhance students' social skills (Tabassum et al., 2024), debating skills (Collard & Looney, 2014), and subject-based knowledge (Çelebi, 2016). As a result, the reintroduction of these clubs is anticipated to enhance both scholastic achievement and promote a supportive environment for students. This holistic approach to education can contribute to the overall academic well-being and success of students in the long run (Atakpo, 2024a). There are three aspects of peer support networks common in secondary schools today; they include the social; skills club, debating societies, and subject-based clubs.

- **Social Skills Clubs:** In the school environment, social skills clubs play a crucial role in promoting interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, and teamwork among students. Peer support clubs offer students the opportunity to improve their social skills by engaging in a variety of activities and interactions. By participating in social skills clubs, students can improve their ability to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, and collaborate with others (Tabassum et al., 2024). The clubs often organize workshops, role-playing exercises, and group discussions to help students develop empathy, active listening, and assertiveness. Additionally, social skills clubs create a supportive and inclusive environment where students from diverse backgrounds can build meaningful connections and friendships (Lozano-Peña et al., 2021).
- **Debating Societies:** Debating societies in the school environment play a significant role in honing students' critical thinking, public speaking, and persuasive communication skills. These societies provide a platform for students to engage in structured debates on various topics, allowing them to research, analyze, and present their arguments coherently and convincingly (D'souza, 2013). Participation in debating societies not only enhances students' verbal communication skills but also fosters their ability to think critically, form evidence-based arguments, and respectfully consider different perspectives. Moreover, debating societies help students develop confidence, leadership qualities, and the capacity to articulate their viewpoints effectively (Collard & Looney, 2014).
- **Subject-Based Clubs:** Subject-based clubs in the school environment provide students with opportunities to explore and deepen their understanding of specific academic disciplines or areas of interest. These clubs cater to students' diverse interests and passions, allowing them to delve into subjects beyond the standard curriculum (Gonsalves, 2014). Subject-specific clubs provide students with opportunities to participate in practical activities, conversations, and initiatives that align with their interests in various disciplines such as science, technology, literature, and arts. Through these clubs, students can broaden their knowledge, develop practical skills, and interact with like-minded peers who share their academic interests. Furthermore, subject-based clubs often invite guest speakers, organize field trips, and facilitate workshops to supplement students' learning experiences. By participating in subject-based clubs, students can cultivate a deeper appreciation for their chosen subjects, gain insights into potential career paths, and develop a sense of community with fellow enthusiasts (Çelebi, 2016). Overall, subject-based clubs enrich students' academic journey, fostering a passion for learning and exploration beyond the confines of traditional classroom instruction.

The phrase "students' academic well-being" has its roots in the idea that a student's overall health and happiness can directly impact their academic success. This includes factors such as mental health, physical health, and emotional well-being. According to Aulia (2016), well-being encompasses physical, mental, and social wellness, going beyond the mere absence of illness. This holistic perspective underscores the significance of supporting students' overall well-being to enhance their academic achievements. According to Lyubomirsky et al. (2015), children with a strong sense of well-being tend to exhibit traits such as cooperation, confidence, creativity, tolerance, and altruism. Furthermore, academic success has been linked to higher levels of student well-being, as evidenced by research conducted by Hascher (2019) which found that students who excel in school generally report feeling more positive about their educational experience compared to those who struggle academically.

This study is anchored on the social capital theory, propounded by scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam in the 1980s. The theory posits that social networks and relationships within a community contribute to social cohesion, trust, and cooperation among individuals, which can be leveraged for personal and professional gain (Adam & Roncevic, 2013). The theory can be used to explain how individuals' connections and interactions can be a valuable resource for accessing information, resources, and opportunities to advance their personal and professional goals.

The relevance of the social capital theory to the present study, which focused on peer support networks as a predictor for students' academic well-being, lies in its ability to provide insight into how the quality of relationships within these networks can impact academic outcomes. The connection between social capital theory and peer support networks specifically lies in the fact that social capital theory emphasizes the importance of trust, reciprocity, and shared norms in relationships, which are essential components of effective peer support networks. When students feel a sense of trust and reciprocity within their peer support networks, they are more

likely to experience higher levels of academic well-being. This study highlights the significance of fostering positive relationships within peer support networks to enhance students' academic success.

Student academic well-being has been a major focus of educational research, with studies consistently showing that a sense of belonging and community positively impacts student motivation and engagement (Bolsoni-Silva et al., 2018). In the Nigerian educational system, where there is much emphasis on student academic performance, which exerts significant pressure on students, not minding the impact on their mental health and overall well-being (Magaji, et al. 2022). Tabassum and Akhter (2020) believe that fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment is crucial for promoting student academic well-being in such high-pressure educational systems. They suggest that implementing strategies to enhance students' sense of belonging and connectedness can help mitigate the negative effects of academic stress and improve overall student outcomes. Based on the foregoing, this study investigates peer support networks as predictors for students' academic well-being in senior secondary schools in the study area.

Statement of Problem

Over the years, concerns have been raised regarding the continued poor outcome of students academic activities ranging from low test scores to high dropout rates. These issues have been attributed to various factors such as lack of resources, ineffective teaching methods, and socioeconomic disparities among students. However, there has been little or no attention given to the influence of academic pressure, lack of support, and mental health struggles on students' academic well-being, which has become increasingly prevalent in recent years. It is crucial to address these factors to provide a holistic approach to improving student academic success and overall well-being.

One of the primary issues affecting the academic well-being of secondary school students is the overwhelming pressure to perform well academically. As students progress through their secondary education, the expectations and demands placed on them can lead to high levels of stress and anxiety. The expectations to succeed in school, standardized assessments, and the college application process can negatively impact students' mental and emotional health. This persistent pressure may result in exhaustion, emotional strain, and a decrease in academic achievement.

Another significant issue impacting the academic well-being of secondary school students is the lack of adequate support systems. Many students struggle with challenging coursework, complex subjects, and academic expectations without receiving the necessary support from teachers, counsellors, or parents. Without proper guidance and support, students may feel isolated, helpless, and unmotivated to succeed academically. This lack of support can hinder their ability to stay engaged in their studies and maintain a positive attitude towards learning.

The psychological well-being of high school students plays a crucial role in their academic success. Challenges like anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues can have a profound effect on students' academic performance by hindering their focus and concentration. Additionally, the stigma associated with mental health can act as a barrier for students seeking the necessary support, ultimately worsening their academic well-being. Addressing and supporting students' mental health needs is crucial for creating a positive and conducive learning environment.

These three issues are interconnected and can have a profound impact on the academic well-being of secondary school students. By addressing these challenges and implementing appropriate interventions and support systems, schools can work towards creating a more positive and nurturing academic environment for their students. It is based on the aforementioned backdrop that this study investigated peer support networks as predictors for students' academic well-being in senior secondary schools in the study area.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study investigated peer support networks as predictors for students' academic well-being in senior secondary schools in Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. The objectives were to:

1. explore the relationship between social skills clubs and students' academic well-being.
2. examine the relationship between debating societies and students' academic well-being.
3. ascertain the relationship between subject-based clubs and students' academic well-being.

Research Question

1. What is the relationship between social skills clubs and students' academic well-being?
2. What is the relationship between debating societies and students' academic well-being?
3. What is the relationship between subject-based clubs and students' academic well-being?

Hypotheses

1. Social skills clubs do not significantly relate to students' academic well-being.
2. Debating societies do not significantly relate to students' academic well-being.

3. Subject-based clubs do not significantly relate to students' academic well-being.

II. Methodology

This study adopted a correlational research design. The design focuses on the relationship between two or more variables, without looking at the effect causes. With the design, the strength and direction of the correlation can be determined. Since the present study, investigates peer support networks as predictors for students' academic well-being, the correlational research design was considered suitable in guiding the methodology of this research.

The study's population consisted of 20,235 students from public senior secondary schools in the study area. A total of 377 students were included in the study based on the sample size calculation using the Taro Yamane formula, ensuring a representative sample for the study. The stratified random sampling technique was employed to select students from different schools in the area, ensuring diversity and representation in the study.

The Peer Support Networks and Students' Academic Well-being Questionnaire (PSNSAWQ), comprised of the Peer Support Networks Survey (PSS) and the Academic Well-being Survey (AWS), were used to collect the required data for the study. The researcher created the instruments, and participants rated them using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (1 point). The questionnaire was reviewed for accuracy and relevance by an expert in Measurement and Evaluation as well as a Psychologist. The reliability coefficient of 0.87 was determined using the Split-half test; suggesting that the questionnaires had acceptable internal consistency. The study utilised Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to answer and test the research questions and null hypotheses at a significance level of 0.05, respectively.

III. Results

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between social skills clubs and students' academic well-being?

The hypothesis of the above research question is stated and tested based on the result of PPMC analysis, as shown below:

Hypothesis 1: Social skills clubs does not significantly relate to students' academic well-being.

Table 1: PPMC on the relationship between social skills club and students' academic well-being

Correlations			
		Social Skills Club	Students' Academic Wellbeing
Social Skills Club	Pearson Correlation	1	0.760**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	n	377	377
Students' Academic Wellbeing	Pearson Correlation	0.760**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	n	377	377

** Correlation is significant at alpha level of 0.05 (2-tailed).

Table 1 shows the connection between social skills clubs and students' academic well-being. The study found a strong connection between participating in a social skills club and students' academic success ($r = 0.760$), with the r -value within the range of $r \leq \pm 0.60$ to ± 0.79 . Thus, research question one is answered. Furthermore, Table 1 illustrated that there is a strong and substantial connection between social skills clubs and students' academic well-being ($r = 0.760$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05$). Thus, null hypothesis one is rejected at alpha level of 0.05.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between debating societies and students' academic well-being?

The hypothesis of the above research question is stated and tested based on the result of PPMC analysis, as shown below:

Hypothesis 2: Debating societies does not significantly relate to students' academic well-being.

Table 2: PPMC on the relationship between debating societies and students' academic well-being

Correlations			
		Debating Society	Students' Academic Wellbeing
Debating Society	Pearson Correlation	1	0.669**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	n	377	377
Students' Academic Wellbeing	Pearson Correlation	0.669**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	n	377	377

** Correlation is significant at alpha level of 0.05 (2-tailed).

Table 2 illustrates the connection between debating societies and students' academic well-being. The result illustrated that the relationship between debating societies and students' academic well-being is strong ($r = 0.669$), with the r -value within the range of $r \leq \pm 0.60$ to ± 0.79 . Thus, research question two is answered. Furthermore, Table 2 illustrated that there is a strong and substantial connection between debating societies and students' academic well-being ($r = 0.669$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05$). Thus, null hypothesis two is rejected at alpha level of 0.05.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between subject-based clubs and students' academic well-being?

The hypothesis of the above research question is stated and tested based on the result of PPMC analysis, as shown below:

Hypothesis 3: Subject-based clubs does not significantly relate to students' academic well-being.

Table 3: PPMC on the relationship between subject-based clubs and students' academic well-being

Correlations			
		Subject-based Clubs	Students' Academic Wellbeing
Subject-based Clubs	Pearson Correlation	1	0.767**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	n	377	377
Students' Academic Wellbeing	Pearson Correlation	0.767**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	n	377	377

** . Correlation is significant at alpha level of 0.05 (2-tailed).

Table 3 illustrates the connection between subject-based clubs and students' academic well-being. The result illustrated that the relationship between subject-based clubs and students' academic well-being is strong ($r = 0.767$), with the r -value within the range of $r \leq \pm 0.60$ to ± 0.79 . Thus, research question three is answered. Furthermore, Table 3 illustrated that there is a strong and substantial connection between subject-based clubs and students' academic well-being ($r = 0.767$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05$). Thus, null hypothesis three is rejected alpha level of 0.05.

IV. Discussion Of The Findings

The result of research question one illustrated that the connection between social skills clubs and students' academic well-being is strong. Furthermore, the result of hypothesis one illustrated that there is a strong and substantial connection between social skills clubs and students' academic well-being; this resulted in the refusal of the null hypothesis. These results align with the research conducted by Tabassum et al. (2024), which illustrated a significant impact of social skills on the academic performance of the students. These findings suggest that implementing social skills clubs in educational settings can positively impact students' academic well-being, supporting the idea that developing social skills can lead to improved academic outcomes.

The result of research question two illustrated that the connection between debating societies and students' academic well-being is strong. Furthermore, the result of hypothesis two illustrated that there is a strong and substantial connection between debating societies and students' academic well-being; this resulted in the refusal of the null hypothesis. These results align with the research conducted by Ko and Mezuk (2021), which illustrated that competitive debate is associated with better academic outcomes for students. These findings imply that schools should consider implementing debating societies as a way to enhance students' academic success and overall well-being. Furthermore, teachers should focus on providing chances for students to enhance their critical thinking and public speaking skills by joining debate clubs, as these skills have been shown to positively impact academic performance and overall student well-being.

The result of research question three illustrated that the relationship between subject-based clubs and students' academic well-being is strong. Furthermore, the result of hypothesis three illustrated that there is a strong and substantial connection between subject-based clubs and students' academic well-being; this resulted in the refusal of the null hypothesis. These results align with the research conducted by Cabrejas and Mendoza (2023), which illustrated that school clubs and organizations are extremely relevant to students in all aspects. These findings imply that subject-based clubs play a crucial role in enhancing students' academic well-being, emphasizing the importance of extracurricular activities in overall student success. These results highlight the need for schools to continue supporting and promoting subject-based clubs as a means to positively impact students' academic performance and well-being.

V. Conclusion

This study investigated peer support networks as predictors for students' academic well-being. The findings illustrated that social skills clubs, debating societies, and subject-based clubs had a significant positive

correlation with students' academic well-being. This implies that students who actively participate in peer support networks are more likely to experience higher levels of academic well-being. As such, the study concluded that participation in extracurricular activities that promote social interaction and intellectual engagement can benefit students' academic well-being in their field of study. Participating in extracurricular activities allows students to build skills and relationships that help them succeed academically and overall.

VI. Recommendations

1. The management of secondary schools should prioritise the establishment and support of social skills clubs to enhance students' social interactions and academic well-being in the study area.
2. The Delta State Government, through the Ministry of Education, should allocate resources towards promoting debating societies so that students can enhance critical thinking and boost academic achievement by engaging in organized debates and conversations. Encourage students to think critically and excel academically by participating in structured debates and discussions.
3. Students should form subject-based clubs to deepen their understanding of specific academic subjects and foster a sense of community among peers with similar interests.

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