

## Parental Will, Peer Pressure, Academic Ability and School Subjects Selection by Students in Senior Secondary Schools

J.W. Owoyele and O.M. Toyobo

Department of Counselling Psychology, Tai Solarin University of Education,  
Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria

**Abstract:** The study investigated parental will, peer pressure and academic achievement as correlate of subjects' selection by students in Senior Secondary Schools in Ogun State. The aim was to determine the predictive potency of these factors (parental will, peer pressure and academic ability) on students' choice of subjects with a view to providing appropriate counselling for students. A sample of 1000 students was randomly drawn to participate in the study. The School Subject Factor Questionnaires (SSFQ) developed and validated by the researchers was used for data collection. The instrument had internal consistency of 0.88 on Cronbach alpha and yielded 0.83 co efficient of reliability from 2 administrations with 2 weeks interval. Two research questions were answered using regression analysis. Findings revealed the combined significant predictive potency of parental will, peer pressure and academic ability on students' choice of school subjects. Further analysis revealed that peer pressure was the most potent predictor, followed by parental will, while academic ability was the least predictor of students' choice of school subjects. Adequate academic and career guidance and counselling services were recommended to guide students in choosing school subjects at the senior secondary school level.

**Key words:** School subjects, parental will, peer pressure, academic ability, guidance and counselling

### INTRODUCTION

Making choices from an array of alternatives is an integral part of life. At various stages of life, individuals have to make some important decisions. Some of such decisions tend to have everlasting impacts on the individual. One of such delicate and life implicating decisions is the choice of school subjects at the senior secondary school level. It is one decision that tends to determine students' future educational and career progress. Some researches have tried to identify a considerable number of factors influencing subjects' selection by students in secondary schools. Some literature reviewed identified many factors that are likely to influence students' subject selection including school policy, parental-will (Davis-Kean, 2005), peer influence (Addy and Biddulgh, 2001; Owoyele, 2007), academic ability, intelligence, age, sex, ignorance and accidental choice (Cooley and Comber, 2003). The contribution of each of these factors is still obscure and studies on the most likely positive determinant of school subject selection in terms of predicting students' success in future educational and career endeavours are still inconclusive. This study therefore considers parental will,

peer pressure and academic ability as correlate of school subjects selection by students in senior secondary schools.

**Parental will:** Many parents are in the habit of determining virtually all academic decisions for their children. They choose the school to attend, the books to read and even the subjects to study in school (Owoyele, 1999). Parental education and social economic status seems to have an impact on students' academic performance and subject selection (Davis-Kean, 2005). Many researchers have noted that the educational level of parents could a predictor of the kind of subjects students will choose at senior class level based on experience and what they want their children to become in the later life (Kirk, 2000). It was observed that parents that are well-read and professional in different field could be better equipped to help children with the understanding of concepts behind each course or field a child is interested on than those with less experience and qualifications.

Parental influence, teacher input, subject enjoyment and perceived usefulness of subjects to a future job or career are of significant influence on subject selection in

senior secondary school classes (Addy and Biddulgh, 2001). Parents that are very wealthy and rich would have programmed the kind of discipline or professions they want their children take to (Davis-Kean, 2005). For instance, parents that are doctors, lawyers and artisans would want their children to take after them, so that the much money invested into the business will not be inherited by another person or become useless. They tend to have influence in students subject selection for the case of child-parent futurity. Meanwhile, previous research work has made evident the positive influence of parental education in students' subject selection.

**Peer pressure:** Many peers act as important role models, who are seen as powerful means of transmitting attitudes, values, norms and patterns of thought and behaviour (Badura, 1986). A very interesting question to gauge the effect of peers on academic achievement and subject selection was asked. The survey asked the students to strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement my friends in sciences make fun of students in arts classes. This question or statement is particularly useful in measuring the effects of peers on academic achievement/subject selection (Kirk, 2000). Betts and Zau (2004) and Vigdor and Nechyba (2004) showed that the analysis of peer pressure at class level yield stronger effects compared to the academic level.

In many occasions students fantastically visualize what they intend to become through subject selection while playing among their colleagues. Eventually, they end up pursuing their intention through peer influence or pressure. Their analysis addresses the reciprocal nature of peer interactions and interpretation of estimates based upon models using past achievement as the measure of peer group activity (Tella *et al.*, 2007). The results indicated that peer pressure has a positive effect on students' subject selection and achievement growth. It has also been reported that adolescents enjoy peer support on choice of school subjects and vocational aspirations (Ablard, 1997). Peer support has also been found to be positively related to adolescents' academic achievement and choice of school subjects (Owoyele, 2007).

**Academic ability:** Performance of students in junior school examination determine students placement in the senior school level. It is noted that students took account of their previous experiences academically in making option choices and there was widespread concern that they were rejecting science because of their negative attitude towards the subject (Polard *et al.*, 2003; Wikeley and Stable, 1999). When examining students'

academic performance and subject selection, gender difference influence could not be erased. Gender differences in attitudes towards the subjects like Mathematics, Physics, Biology and Chemistry. More boys than girls were more likely to have an instrumental view of the subjects indicating that they would study them because of their importance in life beyond school (Ajiboye and Tella, 2006).

Result from another study indicated that male are more likely to be either disengaged or highly engaged in constructive educational activities while women are more likely to fall in between these extremes into a more typical group (Hu and Kuh, 2002). It is further observed that gender studies concluded that girls tended to view science, engineering and technology (SET) courses as an area that is not appropriate for them. They tend to choose careers requiring inter-personal skills and are deterred by the view that SET subjects and careers are less involved with people and relationships (Coolley and Comber, 2003; Polard *et al.*, 2003). It is also clear that students' attitudes towards a subject may influence their choice of subject and academic performance and they would unlikely seek careers in which a disliked subject was a key component.

**Statement of the problem:** The study investigated the correlates of parental will, peer pressure and academic achievement on students' subjects' selection.

#### **Research questions:**

- What is the joint contribution of parental will, peer influence and academic ability to subjects' selection by students in Senior Secondary Schools?
- What is the relative contribution of each of the variables to subjects' selection by students in Senior Secondary School?

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study adopted an ex-post facto research approach. This approach does not involve the manipulation of variables. It neither adds to nor subtracts from the existing facts. It only carefully observes and records information as it naturally occurred at the time the study was conducted.

**Participants:** Twenty Secondary Schools selected through simple random technique from the four zones (Ijebu, Remo, Egba and Yewa) in Ogun State, Nigeria were used in the study. In each of the randomly selected schools 100 participants were selected through a simple random sampling technique. On the whole (1000) students participated in the study. All the participants were

selected from Senior Secondary Class1 (SS1). Their age ranged between 14-17 years with a mean age of 15-43 years.

**Instrumentation:** The researchers designed and validated questionnaires titled School Subjects Factor Questionnaire (SSFQ) for use in the study. The instrument had 3 sections with section one requesting for demographic data like name of school, class, age, sex, family size and so on. Section 2 requested a list of subjects being offered by respondents while section 3 divided into tree sub-sections contained items which measured parental will, peer pressure and academic achievement in relation to subjects selection in school. Samples of the items include My parents selected my school subjects for me I selected subjects that my friends generally preferred I selected subjects that I often pass very well. The SSFQ had internal consistency of 0.88 on Cronbach alpha while the test re-test reliability procedure yielded 0.83.

**Procedure:** The questionnaires were administered in the selected schools after necessary permission had been obtained from the schools authorities. The researchers along with class teachers who acted as research assistants retrieved the questionnaires as soon as they were completed. They were later scored and the data generated were analyzed using regression analysis.

## RESULTS

Table 1 revealed significant joint contribution of parental-will, peer pressure and academic ability to selection of school subjects ( $F = 24.48$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Further analysis shows that the combination of the 3 independent variables (parental-will, peer pressure and academic ability) in predicting school subjects selection by students yielded a co-efficient of multiple regression ( $R$ ) of 0.8211 and a multiple R-square ( $R^2$ ) of 0.6742. This means that parental will, peer pressure and academic ability jointly accounted for 67.42% of the variance in selection of school subjects by students.

Table 2 revealed that peer pressure was the most potent predictor of students' choice of school subjects ( $B = 0.276$ ;  $t = 2.105$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Parental will was the next potent predictor ( $B = 0.268$ ;  $t = 2.034$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) while academic ability was the least potent predictor ( $B = 0.232$ ;  $t = 1.983$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). However, each of the variables individually significantly predicted selection of school subjects by students.

Table 1: Regression analysis of combined contribution of parental-will, peer pressure and academic ability to the prediction of subjects' selection

Source of variation	df	SS	MS	F-ratior	p-value
Due to regression	3	4321.64	1440	24.48	0.01
Due to residual	796	46835.30	58.84		
Total	799	51156.94			

Multiple R (adjusted) = 0.8211; Multiple R<sup>2</sup> adjusted = 0.6742; Standard error of estimate = 3.912

Table 2: Relative contribution of independent variables to the prediction of subject selection by students

Variables	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		p-value
	B	S.E	Beta	t-value	
Parental will	0.268	0.068	-0.041	2.034	0.002
Peer pressure	0.276	0.073	-0.048	2.105	0.003
Academic ability	0.232	0.041	-0.022	1.983	0.041
Constant	31.004	8.321		3.434	0.000

## DISCUSSION

The finding of this study revealed that all the 3 independent variables (parental will, peer pressure and academic ability) when combined significantly predicted students' choice of school subjects at the senior secondary school level. It was found that, the 3 variables jointly accounted for 67.42% of the variance in choice of school subjects. It shows that, the 3 variables accounted for a great percentage of the variance in school subject selection. Greater attention must therefore be placed on these factors when it comes to guiding students on subject selection. This result is quite plausible considering the extent to which students often depend on their parents and peers for advice before making vital decisions. This finding lends credence to Davis-Kean (2005) who observes that parents often have impacts on their children's education. It also corroborates previous studies which have reported the influence of parents, peers and academic ability on choice of school subjects (Addy and Biddulgh, 2001; Betts and Zau, 2004; Ajiboye and Tella, 2006).

Further analysis of data revealed that peer pressure was the most potent predictor of students' choice of school subjects, followed by parental will while academic ability was the least predictor. This finding implies that students give more consideration to their peers and parents' wishes over and above their own academic ability before selecting school subjects. This trend may not augur well for the educational development of students who relied more on peer pressure and parental will than on their own academic ability. The reason is that peers may not know better than one another in terms of they stand to gain from choosing some subjects. Similarly, parents may not based their decisions on scientific grounds nor on the reality on ground and this may not

augur well for the future of adolescents. This trend buttresses the observation that fewer students take up science, engineering and technical careers because they have been made to believe by their peers and parents that such careers are less involved with people and relationships (Colley and Comber, 2003; Polard *et al.*, 2003).

**Implications for Counselling:** The findings have some implications for counselling in Nigerian schools. Professional guidance and counselling services are needed to guide students on how to choose subjects based on their academic ability, interest and the relevance of such subjects to their future career aspirations. Schools must endeavour to organize academic and career counselling services before such students are asked to select school subjects. The need to employ appropriate psychological instruments which can help reveal students' innate abilities, interests and aptitude can also be deduced from the findings of this study. In this age of competitive opportunities relying on peer pressure or parental will may put the young ones at a disadvantaged position, modern counselling skills and facilities should rather be adopted.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major conclusion drawn from this study is that students' choice of subjects at school is influenced jointly by peer pressure, parental will and academic ability but it is influenced more by peer pressure and parental will than by their academic ability. It is therefore recommended that adequate academic and career guidance and counselling should be given to students before they could select school subjects. This again requires that efficient guidance and counselling centres should be set up in schools while qualified and professional counsellors should be employed to render appropriate academic and career counselling services to students, their parents and other members of the school community.

## REFERENCES

- Ablard, K.E., 1997. Self-perception and needs as a function of academic ability. *Roeper Rev.*, 6: 65-67.
- Addy, K. and M. Biddulgh, 2001. The influence of pupil perceptions on subject choice at 14th conference on Geography and History. *Edu. Stud.*, 27 (4): 39-50.
- Ajiboye, J.O. and A. Tella, 2006. Class attendance and gender effects on undergraduate students' achievement in a social studies course. *Essays in Education: An Online J. Fall. In Press*, pp: 18.
- Badura, A., 1986. Observational learning. Chapter 2 in *social foundation of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*, Prentice-Hall, Inc; U.S.A.
- Betts, J. and R. Zau, 2004. Peer and academic achievement: Panel evidence from administrative data. *Public Policy Institute of California*.
- Cooley, A. and C. Comber, 2003. School subject preferences, age and gender differences revisited. *Edu. Stud.*, 29 (1): 59-67.
- Davis-Kean, P.E., 2005. The influences of parents' education and family income on child achievement; the indirect role of parental expectations and the home environment. *Family Psychol.*, 19: 294-304.
- Hu, S. and G.D. Kuh, 2002. Being disengaged in educational purposely activities. The influences of student and institution characteristics. *Res. Higher Edu.*, 43: 555-575.
- Kirk, A.J., 2000. The peer effect on academic achievement among public elementary school students. *Research Education Centre for Data Analysis Report, No.6 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Data, 1998*.
- Owoyele, J.W., 2007. Adolescent peer support as a factor in academic performance of senior secondary school students. *Ogun J. Counsell. Stud.*, 1 (1): 71-75.
- Owoyele, J.W., 1999. *A Guide to Academic Success*. Ijebu-ode; Olubade Press.
- Polard, E., N. Jaggar, S. Perryman M. Van Gant and K. Mann, 2003. *Reading SET Go: A Review of SET study and careers choices* (Online). <http://www.eteachbco.uk/pdf/Reading SET Go. Pdf> (24 May, 2005)
- Tella, A., O.E. Adu and O.M. Toyobo, 2007. Parental education, peer and gender effects on academic achievement of secondary schools students. In: *Botswana. Medwell Journals. Soc. Sci.*, 2 (1): 76-83.
- Vigdor, J. and T. Nerhyba, 2004. Peer effects in North Canadian public schools: *Duke University Durban USA, A Working Paper*.
- Wikeley, F. and A. Stable, 1999. Changes in school students approaches to subjects options and choices: A study of students in the West of England in 1984 and 1996. *Edu. Res.*, 41 (3): 287-299.