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# PEER GROUP DYNAMICS AND GRADE-SKIPPING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS, SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*This research investigated Peer group dynamics and Grade-Skipping Students' Academic Achievement in English Language in Private Secondary Schools in Southwest Nigeria. Thorough search of literature shows scarcity of studies on the Peer group dynamics and Grade-Skipping Students' Academic Achievement in English Language in Private Secondary Schools in Southwest Nigeria. The research was guided by social learning theory and Attachment Theory. Two research questions were raised to guide the study. Descriptive survey research design was employed. Target population comprised of all private secondary school teachers (41,404) and students (901,945) in Southwest, Nigeria. Three Southwest states, 1,954 teachers and 2,001 students were sampled using multi-stage sampling procedure. Two instruments– Peer group dynamics Questionnaire (PSQ)(α = .890)"and "Academic Achievement of Grade-Skipped Students in English Language (AAGSSEQ)" (K20 = 0.810) were used to collect data. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics methods of standard deviation. Results revealed that academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language is at a moderate level ($\bar{x}$= 3.023). Peer group dynamics in the area of peer group cohesion is at a moderate level ($\bar{x}$= 2.873) and lastly, peer academic performance ($\bar{x}$= 2.792). It concludes that moderate level of peer group dynamics could be responsible for academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language within private secondary schools moderate level in Southwest, Nigeria. It was recommended that there should be collaborative learning with high-performing peers by the students and this will enhance academic outcome.*

AJEMATES
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**Key words:** Parental Support, Grade-Skipping Students' Academic Achievement, English Language, Private Secondary Schools

## Introduction

English language holds a pivotal role in the educational landscape of Nigeria, serving as the primary medium of instruction and communication in schools. Proficiency in English is crucial for academic success, particularly in secondary education, where the complexity of the language increases with each grade level. English language skills are essential not only for passing exams but also for effective communication, critical thinking, and accessing global knowledge and opportunities. Consequently, the academic achievement of students in English language is a significant indicator of their overall academic performance and future educational prospects (Wang, Li, & Zhang, 2022)

Students' academic achievement in English language is influenced by a myriad of factors, including cognitive abilities, motivation, teaching quality, and educational resources. However, grade-skipping introduces a unique dynamic to this mix, potentially accelerating cognitive development but also presenting challenges in social and emotional adjustment. The success of grade-skipped students in mastering the English language depends on how well they can adapt to the accelerated academic demands and social environments of higher grades (Allen, Katharine, Mbachu, Akunne, 2022)

Students' academic achievement in English language is a crucial determinant of their overall academic success and future opportunities. Proficiency in English is essential for effective communication, comprehension, and expression across various subjects, making it a fundamental skill in the educational system (Assouline, Lupkowski-Shoplik, & Colangelo 2023). In many countries, including Nigeria, English is not only a subject but also the primary medium of instruction. Therefore, students' ability to excel in English language significantly impacts their performance in other academic areas, as well as their readiness for higher education and professional career (Amal, Rambe, Ampera, Purba, & Ridho, 2022). Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, drives students to engage with the language, practice regularly, and strive for improvement. Quality instruction, characterized by skilled and experienced teachers, effective teaching methods, and a supportive learning environment, is vital for developing students' English language skills (Alshammari, Alturki, & Alenazi, 2024).

Grade-skipping, or academic acceleration, adds another layer of complexity to the factors influencing students' academic achievement in English language. Grade-skipped students often face advanced academic challenges and are

required to adapt quickly to higher levels of coursework (Calixtro, 2022). While this acceleration can stimulate intellectual growth and motivation, it may also lead to difficulties in social and emotional adjustment, which can impact academic performance. The success of grade-skipped students in English language depends on their ability to cope with these challenges and the support they receive from parents, teachers, and peers (Cui, Zhang, & Leung, 2023)

Peer group dynamics refer to the social interactions and relationships that occur within a group of individuals of similar age, status, or interest. These dynamics are crucial in shaping behaviors, attitudes, and identity, especially during adolescence when peer influence becomes particularly significant. Understanding peer group dynamics involves examining how group interactions affect individual behavior, group cohesion, social norms, and overall development (Chakraborty, 2023).

Peer group dynamics significantly influence the experience and outcomes of grade-skipped students, particularly in the area of their academic achievement. Peer groups can either support or hinder the adjustment of grade-skipped students to higher academic levels, including their proficiency in subjects like English language (Hughes, Pierce, & Gibson, 2021). One of the primary influences of peer group dynamics is peer academic performance. Being surrounded by peers who excel academically can motivate grade-skipped students to strive for higher achievement in English language and other subjects. Conversely, peers who struggle academically may not provide the same level of academic encouragement, potentially impacting the grade-skipped student's motivation and performance (Herbst, Sobotka, & Wójcik, 2023)

Peer group cohesion refers to the strength of the bonds between group members and their commitment to the group. High group cohesion often results in strong group identity and adherence to group norms. These norms dictate acceptable behaviors and attitudes within the group, influencing individual actions (Golsteyn, Non, & Zölitz, 2021). Peer groups with positive norms can encourage constructive behaviors, while those with negative norms can promote harmful actions (Herbst, Sobotka, & Wójcik, 2023). Understanding group cohesion and norms is crucial for addressing both positive and negative peer influences. Peer groups often have informal leaders who influence group decisions and behaviors. These leaders can emerge based on charisma, expertise, or social skills. Hierarchies within peer groups can affect group dynamics, with leaders playing a key role in setting norms and resolving conflicts. Recognizing the role of leadership and hierarchies in peer groups helps in understanding how influence is exerted and maintained (Weiss, Moehnke, & Kipp, 2021)

Peer academic performance plays a significant role in shaping a student's own academic achievements and attitudes toward learning. This influence stems from the social interactions and comparisons that students make with their peers in academic settings. The performance of peers can create a

competitive or supportive environment that affects individual motivation, self-esteem, and academic outcomes (Laursen, & Veenstra, 2023). When students are surrounded by high-achieving peers, they often experience a positive impact on their own academic performance. This phenomenon can be attributed to several factors, including increased motivation to match the performance of peers, access to peer support and collaborative learning opportunities, and the establishment of high academic standards within the peer group. High-achieving peers can serve as role models, demonstrating effective study habits and attitudes toward learning that others may emulate (Li, Choi, & Forrest, 2023)

**Statement of the Problem**

The phenomenon of grade-skipping, where students are advanced to higher grade levels than typical for their age, has been implemented as a strategy to address the academic needs of exceptionally gifted students. However, the impact of this acceleration on students' academic achievement, particularly in English language, remains inadequately explored in the aspect of private secondary schools in South West Nigeria. There is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding how peer group dynamics affect the academic performance of grade-skipped students in this region Wentzel, Jablansky & Scalise (2021). Peer group dynamics which encompassing peer academic performance and group cohesion play a crucial role in students' academic achievement and social adjustment can significantly shape students' academic outcomes. The current gap in research fails to address how these variables interact and influence the academic achievements of grade-skipped students in English language. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the specific ways in which peer group dynamics influence the academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language within private secondary schools in Southwest Nigeria.

**Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of peer group dynamics on the academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language within private secondary schools in Southwest, Nigeria. The objectives were to;

i. identify the level of academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language in private secondary schools in Southwest, Nigeria;
ii. identify the level of peer group dynamics in areas of peer academic performance and group cohesion in private secondary schools in Southwest, Nigeria;

**Research Questions**

This study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the level of academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language in private secondary schools in Southwest, Nigeria?

2. What is the level of peer group dynamics in areas of peer academic performance and peer cohesion in private secondary schools in Southwest, Nigeria?

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Review

This study was anchored on three theories, namely; social learning theory, attachment theory and self-determination theory. Social Learning Theory supports the notion of peer group dynamic on the academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language within private secondary schools in Southwest, Nigeria. Attachment Theory focuses on the importance of early emotional bonds between children and their caregivers in shaping their social, emotional, and cognitive development while Self Determination Theory explores the motivation behind human behavior and the conditions that support intrinsic motivation and personal growth and provide explanation for peer group dynamic indices and academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language within private secondary schools in Southwest, Nigeria (Wang, Li, & Zhang, 2022). This study has thus contributed theoretically by providing useful and relevant application of the above theories to the study on "parental support and academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language within private secondary schools in Southwest, Nigeria" other than the way they were used in previous studies.

### Conceptual Model

The conceptual model for the study shows the relationship between the independent variable (peer group dynamic) and dependent variable (students' Achievement in English language) as illustrated in figure 2.1:

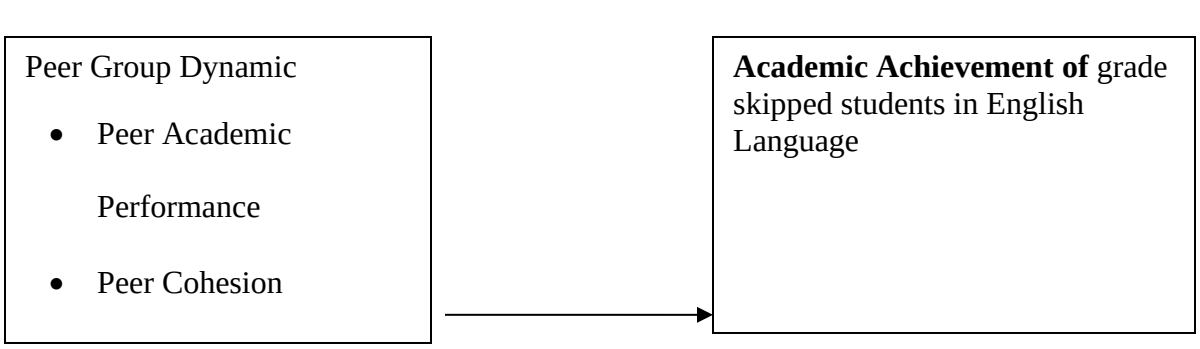



**Figure 2.1:** Conceptual Model of Peer group dynamic and academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language; **Source:** Researcher, 2025

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
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## Methodology

This research employed the descriptive survey research design. Target population comprised of all private secondary school teachers (41,404) and students (901,945) in Southwest, Nigeria. Three Southwest states, 1,954 teachers and 2,001 students were sampled using multi-stage sampling procedure comprising of simple random sampling method, Yamane (Slovin) sample size determination and purposive sampling techniques. Primary data were collected with the aid of two adapted questionnaire titled– Parental Support Questionnaire (PSQ)(α = .890)"and "Academic Achievement of Grade-Skipped Students in English Language (AAGSSEQ)" (K20 = 0.810). The questionnaires were validated using content and face validity and subjected to the test–re-test method for estimation of its reliability. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics methods of frequency, percentages and standard deviation.

## Results

### Answer to Research Questions

**Research Question One**: What is the level of students' academic achievement in English language in private secondary schools in Southwest Nigeria?

**Table 1 Academic Achievement in English Language Tests**

| Mark Obtainable (0-100 ) | Total Mark Obtained Scoring 100 (%) | Grading | Decision Rule |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0-39 | 300(15.0%) | F | Poor Academic Achievement |
| 40-49 | 542(27.1%) | P | Low Academic Achievement |
| 50-59 | 700(35.0%) | C | Average Academic Achievement |
| 60-69 | 309(15.4%) | M | Moderate Academic Achievement |
| 70 and above | 150(07.5%) | D | High Academic Achievement |

**Source: Field Survey, 2025** **N = 2001**

**Key:** F –Fail P – Pass C – Credit M – Merit D –Distinction

**Grading**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 0-39 | F | Fail |
| 40-49 | P | Pass |
| 59-59 | C | Credit |
| 60-69 | M | Merit |
| 70 and above | D | Distinction |

**Decision Rule**

F – Poor Academic Achievement
P – Low Academic Achievement
C – Credit Academic Achievement

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
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M – Merit Academic Achievement
D – High Academic Achievement

Table 1 above reveals the level of academic achievement in English language among SS2 grade-skipped private secondary school students in Southwest, Nigeria. From marks obtained, 300 students which representing 15.0% scored between 0 -39 marks, 542 students representing 27.1% scored between 40-49 marks, 700 students represent 35.0% scored between 50-59%, 309 students representing 15.4% scored between 60 -69 % while the remaining 150 students representing 07.5% scored 70 marks and above. It could be clearly seen in the above table that 300 of the students have poor academic achievement, 542 of the students have low academic achievement. A total of 700 of the students have average academic achievement, 309 possessed moderate academic achievement while just 150 of the students possessed high academic achievement. In conclusion, it was seen from the result of the academic achievement of English Language of the graded skipped students that are larger students are at moderate level.

**Table 2: Level of Peer Group Dynamic of Students (Peer Academic Performance) in Private Secondary Schools in Southwest, Nigeria (n = 1954)**

| S/N | Items | SA | A | D | SD | Mean $\bar{x}$ | Std.Dev |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Grade-skipped students benefit from high-achieving peers, motivating English language improvement. | 523 (26.8 %) | 834 (42.7%) | 398 (20.4%) | 199 (10.1%) | 2.860 | 0.982 |
| 2 | Positive peer academic performance encourages grade-skipped students to strive for excellence. | 480 (24.6 %) | 101 (05.2%) | 383 (19.6%) | 990 (50.6%) | 2.036 | 0.850 |
| 3 | Collaborative learning with high-performing peers enhances grade-skipped students' English language skills | 580 (29.6 %) | 853 (43.7%) | 336 (17.2%) | 185 (09.5%) | 2.935 | 0.955 |
| 4 | Grade-skipped students gain confidence by associating with academically successful peers | 480 (41.5 %) | 818 (29.0%) | 358 (15.9%) | 298 (13.6%) | 2.757 | 0.857 |
| 5 | Exposure to peer academic success inspires grade-skipped students to set ambitious goals. | 1050 (53.7 %) | 635 (32.5%) | 220 (11.3%) | 49 (02.5%) | 3.374 | 0.986 |
| | **Criterion Mean = 2.500; Weighted Mean = 2.792; S.D = 0.926;** | | | | | | |

**Source: Field Work, 2025**
**Criterion Mean = 2.50**
**KEY: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1**
*****Threshold:** mean value of 1.0-1.99 = Very Low Level; 2.00-2.49 = Low Level; 2.50-2.99 = Moderate Level; 3.0- 4.00 = High Level

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.15 (1), May-August, 2025 https://ajemates.org

Table 2 revealed that majority of the teachers "gave the opinion" that grade-skipped students benefit from high-achieving peers, motivating English language improvement **($\bar{x}$ = 2.860)**, exposure to peer academic success inspires grade-skipped students to set ambitious goals **($\bar{x}$ = 3.374)**. collaborative learning with high-performing peers enhances grade-skipped students' English language skills **($\bar{x}$ = 2.935) and** grade-skipped students gain confidence by associating with academically successful peers **($\bar{x}$ = 2.757).** However, few of the respondents gave "disagree" that positive peer academic performance encourages grade-skipped students to strive for excellence **($\bar{x}$ = 2.036)**. Therefore, the weighted mean **($\bar{x}$ = 2.792)** and standard deviation **(.926)** clearly indicates that the level of peer group dynamic of Students in the area of peer academic Performance level is at a moderate level as perceived by majority of their teachers in public secondary schools, Southwest, Nigeria.

**Table 3: Level of Peer Group Dynamic of Students (Peer Group Cohesion) in Private Secondary Schools in Southwest, Nigeria (1954)**

| S/N | Items | SA | A | D | SD | Mean $\bar{x}$ | Std.Dev. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Strong peer group cohesion fosters collaboration in English language learning activities. | 854 (43.7%) | 500 (25.6%) | 400 (20.5%) | 200 (10.2%) | 3.027 | 0.982 |
| 2 | Cohesive peer groups enhance grade-skipped students' engagement in English discussions. | 900 (46.1%) | 560 (28.7%) | 294 (15.0%) | 200 (10.2%) | 3.105 | 1.050 |
| 3 | Unity among peers encourages a shared commitment to academi c success in English. | 980 (50.2%) | 653 (33.4%) | 251 (12.8%) | 70 (03.6%) | 3.301 | 0.955 |
| 4 | Grade-skipped students benefit academically from supportive and cohesive peer relationships | 880 (45.0%) | 615 (31.5%) | 338 (17.3%) | 121 (06.2%) | 3.153 | 1.057 |
| 5 | A cohesive peer group creates a positive atmosphere for English language improvement | 150 (07.7%) | 220 (11.3%) | 634 (32.4%) | 950 (48.6%) | 1.779 | 0.986 |
| | **Criterion Mean = 2.500; Weighted Mean = 2.873; S.D = 1.006;** | | | | | | |

**Source: Field Work**, **2025**

**Criterion Mean = 2.50**

**KEY: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1**

*****Threshold:** mean value of 1.0-1.99 = Very Low Level; 2.00-2.49 = Low Level; 2.50-2.99 = Moderate Level; 3.0- 4.00 = High Level

**3.653**

Table 3 revealed that majority of the teachers "gave the opinion" that strong peer group cohesion fosters collaboration in English language learning activities **($\bar{x}$ = 3.027)**, cohesive peer groups enhance grade-skipped students' engagement in English discussions **($\bar{x}$ = 3.105)**, unity among peers encourages a shared commitment to academic success in English **($\bar{x}$ = 3.301) and** grade-skipped students benefit academically from supportive and cohesive peer relationships **($\bar{x}$ = 3.153).** However, few of the respondents "disagreed" that a cohesive peer group creates a positive atmosphere for English

language improvement **($\bar{x}$ = 1.779)**. The weighted mean **($\bar{x}$ = 2.873)** and standard deviation **(1.006)** clearly indicates that the level of peer group dynamic of students at the peer group cohesion peer level is at a moderate level as perceived by majority of the teachers in public secondary schools, Southwest, Nigeria.

**Discussion of Findings**

This research work investigated peer group dynamics on the academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language within private secondary schools in Southwest, Nigeria. It was revealed that academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language within private secondary schools in Southwest is at a moderate level in Nigeria. This result partially aligns with the work of Petry & Cilliers (2023) who established that academic achievement in English language is at a moderate level. This result almost completely agrees with the result of Hughes et al. (2021) which showed moderate level of academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language. This result do not fully corroborate that of Wang et al. (2022) that showed that academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language within private secondary schools.

In addition, it was revealed that the level of peer group dynamics for academic achievement for students is at moderate level on the aspect of peer academic performance and group cohesion is at a moderate level in public secondary schools in Southwest, Nigeria. This result aligns with that of that of Hornby & Lafaele (2022) which revealed that peer group dynamics such as group cohesion of the students and peer academic performance were at a moderate level. This result corresponds to that of Murphy & Stanton (2021).which revealed moderate level of peer group dynamics of the students.

**Conclusion**

It can be concluded based on the findings that moderate level of peer group dynamics could be responsible for academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language within private secondary schools moderate level in Southwest, Nigeria.

**Recommendations**

1. Academic achievement of grade-skipped students in English language within private secondary schools was found to be at a moderate level. There is need for them to improve their academic instruction of the students from moderate level to a high or very high level. This means the parents and the teachers should ensure regularly and consistently engagement in classroom with the students
2. Peer group dynamics in the area of group cohesion was found to be at a moderate level. This shows that there is need for unity among peers and this encourages a shared commitment to academic success in English Language.
3. Parental support in the area of peer academic performance was found to

be at a moderate level. This shows that there is need for collaborative learning with high-performing peers and this will enhance students' academic outcome. There should be more involvement in the students' academics both at home and in the school.

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