

## PEER GROUP LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ON PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS IN RHINO CAMP REFUGEES SETTLEMENT, MADI-OKOLLO DISTRICT. A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY.

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### ABSTRACT

#### Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine how the peer group learning environment influences learners' performance in primary schools within the Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement.

#### Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive correlational and cross-sectional survey design, utilizing a mixed research approach. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 23. The target population of the study was 151 respondents, consisting of primary seven learners at three selected primary schools in the Rhino Camp settlement. The sample size of the study was determined to be 108 respondents.

#### Results

71% of the respondents were male and 29% were female. There was a positive correlation between peer group learning environment and learners' performance, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.543\*\*. This correlation was statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Peer group learning environment has a significant positive impact on learners' performance. A conducive and supportive learning environment within the peer group contributes to better academic performance.

#### Conclusion

Group learning in a peer environment has a positive influence on learners' performance in primary schools within Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement. It fosters a favorable learning environment, promotes active participation, enhances motivation, improves communication skills, fosters cultural understanding, and provides emotional support. These findings highlight the potential benefits of implementing group learning strategies in primary schools in refugee settlements.

#### Recommendation

Schools should create a conducive learning environment that promotes peer interaction and mutual learning.

**Keywords:** Peer Group, Learning Environment, Performance, Refugees Settlement, Rhino camp

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#### Background of the Study

Peer group groups are among the most influential social forces affecting children, especially adolescent behavior concerning the dress code, hairstyle, music, movies, and sports, to more significant decisions concerning short and long-term education plans (Narr et al, 2019). During the formative adolescent years, Peer groups are arguably even more important than parents, teachers, and counselors, and the Peer group-influenced decisions of youth can have long-lasting consequences (Kimera et al., 2019). Parents recognize the importance of Peer group groups and through their choice of neighborhoods, schools, and activities attempt to guide and direct their Children's friendship selections, which can be increasingly challenging during adolescence (Nagawa et al, 2022).

A good environment should be provided by the home if our children in school must learn, if the school administration must be successful, and if the school must

develop. These include; the level of education of parents, family income, parents' marital status, and attitudes of parents towards the education of their children and the children's attitudes and the quality of learners admitted in school.

Instead, most studies of Peer group effects focus on educational outcomes that are indirectly influenced by friends, such as early cognitive development, grades, promotion, and, most commonly, test scores others have pointed out that if innovations to behavior form an important avenue through which Peer groups affect outcomes, the inability to capture such behavior might lead to a serious underestimation of Peer group influences (Obot et al, 2020). Thus, behavior decisions may lie at the intersection between Peer groups and achievement effectively acting as a mediator through which the influence of Peer groups passes before shaping student achievement (Ogba & Igu, 2019).

Apart from peer group effects related to the classroom

environment, students belonging to the same class tend to study and revise the subject together, so generating important externalities. Friendly relationships do not involve all members of a class: some students might attend courses together, but their interaction might still be limited (Philip, 2013.). We can address this problem by considering a measure of peer groups which weights peer groups about the number of exams taken together. Students who continually do exams in the same session as one another are often students who study together, sharing course material and information (Obot et al., 2020). The purpose of the study was to examine how the peer group learning environment influences learners' performance in primary schools within the Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

This study adopted a descriptive, correlational, and cross-sectional survey design. The descriptive survey design was used to enable the collection of data without manipulating the research variables.

### Study setting

The study was limited to selected primary schools in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement- Madi Okollo district. The selected primary schools are Tika Primary School, Olujobu Primary School, and Eden Primary School. Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement is a refugee camp in the districts of Madi-Okollo and Terego (both formerly part of Arua District) in northwestern Uganda. It was opened in 1980 and expanded in the wake of the South Sudanese civil war to host the sudden influx of refugees into Northern Uganda. As of January 2018, the settlement had 123,243 registered refugees, mostly South Sudanese, and continues to receive new arrivals. These schools were selected due to the poor academic and sports performance of their learners in the 2018, 2019, and 2020 Primary Leaving Examinations. The research used data related to five years right from 2018 to 2022.

### Target Population

The target population of the study formed learner of primary seven at the three selected primary schools in the Rhino camp settlement. The target population was 151 respondents who were used as the population size of the study and were selected as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Target Population**

School	Tika P/s	Olujobu P/s	Eden P/s	DIS	DEO	Total
Learners (P7)	35	40	41			116
Teachers	10	13	10			33
Total	45	53	51	1	1	151

*Source: Madi-Okollo Education office (2023)*

According to Table 1, the selected three schools (Tika P/S, Olujobu P/S, and Eden P/S) have 116 learners in primary seven and 33 teachers. Also, the study will include the District Education officer and District Inspector of Schools in the population of the study. Therefore 151 people were the study population. Primary seven learners of the selected primary school were used because they are old enough and can easily understand questions to give valid responses. Further, Primary seven learners have a vast portfolio of reports that was essential for the study.

Teachers, DIS, and DEO were included in the study since they have rich information regarding the peer groups that learners join and are influential in learners' discipline and performance in the selected information.

### Sample size

The study employed Krejci & Morgan's (1970) table to determine the sample size. The sample size of the study will be 108 respondents.

**Table 2 shows the sample size and sampling techniques of the study**

Categories of respondents	Population size	Sample size	Sampling technique
Learners	116	76	Random sampling
Teachers	33	30	Purposive sampling
DIS	1	1	Purposive sampling
DEO	1	1	Purposive sampling
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>108</b>	

From Table 2, the researcher will select 76 learners and 30 teachers from the selected primary schools proportionately. Also, the District Inspector of schools and the district education officer comprised the sample of the study.

purposive sampling to choose the respondents of the study.

### Sampling techniques

The study used the Random sampling method and

### Random sampling

Simple random sampling was used to select learners to participate in this study. The selected learners (primary seven) were old and hence provided relevant information relating to peer groups and their performance. Also, the

Random sampling method was used because it eliminates bias by providing a chance for everyone to participate in the study.

### **Purposive sampling**

This was used to select teachers, District Inspectors of Schools, and District Education Officers to participate in the study. These were purposely selected because they are knowledgeable on issues of peer group influence on learners' performance since they spend more time with the learners, know their peer groups and always counsel them.

### **Sources of data**

primary and secondary sources of data.

### **Primary data**

Primary data was obtained using questionnaires that were given to learners who were selected for the study. The researcher guided me on how to fill in the answers after which the questionnaires were collected. Questionnaires were given to learners under the guidance of the researcher and teachers to fill out and were collected immediately. Further, the questionnaires were both open and close-ended. The questionnaires were used to collect information relating to peer group influence and learners' performance.

### **Secondary data**

Secondary data was obtained directly from magazines, journals, newspapers, academic reports school databases, and the district's academic department records. This information was obtained including; termly scores of pupils, PLE performance of pupils in selected schools, and completion rate of pupils in primary schools.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Data was collected from the selected respondents using a structured questionnaire and interview guide. The questionnaire contained both closed and open-ended questions drawn from the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was used because it collects a lot of data in a short time. In addition, a wide range of information was obtained hence minimizing bias of individual respondents. The questionnaire was of two sections A and B. Section A covered the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondent such as gender age, marital status, level of education, and occupation. Section B contained questions relating to the objectives of the study.

### **Validity of the Instruments**

To ensure greater chances of data validity, the questionnaires were reviewed with the research supervisor for expert input. A content validity index (CVI) was determined by dividing the relevant questions by the total questions ( $CVI = n/N$ ). The researcher continued with the questionnaire if the CVI was greater than 0.7. This is because it is considered a good measure of validity.

### **Reliability of the research instruments**

The study adopted the coefficient alpha (also known as Cronbach's alpha) to determine the internal reliability of the study instruments. The coefficient alpha ranges in values from 0 (no reliability) to 1 (Perfect reliability). They then state that the values of coefficient alpha above .70 are considered to represent "acceptable" reliability, above .80 "good reliability", and above .90 to represent "excellent" reliability.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Permission to carry out the study was sought after the presentation of the study proposal to the panelists of the Research Committee at Team University. The nature and purpose of the study were explained to the respondents by the researcher. The researcher wrote to the District Education Officer for permission to collect data from schools.

### **Data Analysis techniques**

Data was analyzed, and it was carefully classified, edited, and coded based on clarity, completeness, accuracy, and consistency to ensure reliability. This was done on SPSS version 23 for analysis.

Descriptive statistics was used to summarize, organize, and describe the characteristics of a data collection using mean, mode, standard deviation, and frequency tables.

The researcher used Pearson correlation to examine the relationship between the study variables about the study objectives. Multiple regression models were used for the analysis of the peer group influence on learners' performance in primary schools in Rhino Camp and settlement.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Permission to carry out the study was sought after the presentation of the study proposal to the supervisors at Team University. The nature and purpose of the study were explained to the respondents by the researcher. The researcher ensured and treated all the information given by the respondents with a lot of confidentiality to safeguard the respondent's integrity regarding the University's ethical considerations. In line with human ethics procedures established by the University, the researcher submitted the questionnaire, which was constructed in English to the supervisor for verification. It will be aimed at seeking approval and ensuring the ethical acceptability of the research involving human participants. Accordingly, the pre-testing and pilot study was conducted after obtaining the approval of the supervisor and the University Research Commit.

## **RESULTS**

### **Response rate**

Out of 100 respondents that were selected for this study, they all returned the questionnaires hence the response rate was 100%. Therefore, the response rate of the study was a very good response rate as suggested by (Baruch, 1999) to continue with the study findings

**Background Information of the Respondents**  
**Table 3: Demographic characteristics of the respondents**

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	71	71
Female	29	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Age (year)		
Below 18	70	70
19-45	20	20
46-60	10	10
Marital status		
Single (pupils)	70	70
Married	30	30
Total	100	100
Education level		
Primary	70	70
Secondary	0	0
Diploma	28	28
Bachelors	2	2
Total	100	100

Based on the background information of the respondents, findings show that 71% of the respondents were male and 29% were female. This suggests that there is a higher representation of males among the respondents than females.

On age, 70% of the respondents were below 18 years old, indicating that the majority of the participants were young learners. 20% were between the ages of 19 and 45 and 10% were in the age range of 46-60 years. This distribution suggests that the majority of the respondents are in the younger age group, which aligns with the context of primary schools.

On marital status, 70% of the respondents were single pupils, indicating that the majority of the participants were not married and 30% were married. This finding suggests that the majority of the respondents are not yet married, which is expected in the context of primary schools.

On education level, 70% of the respondents had a primary education level, indicating that the majority had

completed primary school. None of the respondents had a secondary education level, suggesting a lack of representation from higher education levels. 28% had a diploma, indicating some level of post-primary education. Only 2% had a bachelor's degree, indicating.

**Group learning peer environment influences learners' performance in primary schools within Rhino Camp Refuge Settlement.**

The researcher used a Likert scale where the answers were on a scale of 1 to 5. Where 5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree and 1 = Strongly Disagree. The table also includes the summary of the participant's responses based on percentages (P), frequency (F), standard deviation (Std), and mean.

**Table 4: Group learning peer environment and learners' performance in primary schools within Rhino Camp Refuge Settlement**

Statement	Mean	Std
Group learning fosters a favorable learning environment that allows students to support each other by explaining concepts, offering different perspectives, and helping each other understand difficult topics.	4.3	0.3
Group learning encourages active participation among learners	4.1	0.5
Learning in a peer environment enhances motivation among learners	4.2	0.6
Through group discussions, presentations, and collaborative projects, learners develop and improve their communication skills.	4.6	0.4
Group learning in a peer environment provides an opportunity for learners to interact with peers	4.1	0.2

from different cultures, which fosters cultural understanding and sensitization		
Group learning in a peer environment can provide emotional support, especially in refugee camp	4.3	0.5

The statement “*Group learning fosters a favorable learning environment*” had a mean score of 4.3, indicating that participants on average agreed that group learning creates a favorable environment for supporting each other in understanding difficult topics. The low standard deviation (0.3) suggests that there was a high level of agreement among the participants.

The statement “*Group learning encourages active participation*” had a mean score of 4.1, indicating that participants on average agreed that group learning promotes active participation among learners. The higher standard deviation (0.5) suggests that there might be some variation in participants' opinions.

The statement “*Learning in a peer environment enhances motivation*” had a mean score of 4.2, indicating that participants on average agreed that learning in a peer environment boosts learners' motivation. However, the higher standard deviation (0.6) suggests that there might be some variation in participants' opinions.

The statement “*Group discussions, presentations, and collaborative projects improve communication skills*” had a mean score of 4.6, indicating that participants on average agreed that through these activities, learners can develop and enhance their communication skills. The low standard deviation (0.4) suggests a high level of agreement among

the participants.

The statement “*Group learning provides an opportunity for cultural understanding*” had a mean score of 4.1, indicating that participants on average agreed that group learning allows learners to interact with peers from different cultures, fostering cultural understanding. The low standard deviation (0.2) suggests a high level of agreement among the participants.

The statement “*Group learning provides emotional support*” had a mean score of 4.3, indicating that participants on average agreed that group learning in a peer environment can provide emotional support, especially in a refugee camp. The higher standard deviation (0.5) suggests that there might be some variation in participants' opinions.

In conclusion, the data suggests that group learning in a peer environment has a positive influence on learners' performance in primary schools within Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement. It fosters a favorable learning environment, promotes active participation, enhances motivation, improves communication skills, fosters cultural understanding, and provides emotional support. These findings highlight the potential benefits of implementing group learning strategies in primary schools in refugee settlements.

### Correlation findings on peer group learning environment and learners’ performance in primary schools within Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement.

**Table 5: Correlation between peer group prior achievements, peer group compositions, peer group learning environment, and learners’ performance in primary schools within Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement.**

		Peer group learning environment	Learners performance
Learners performance	Pearson Correlation	0.543**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.013	.000
	N	100	100

There was a positive correlation between peer group learning environment and learners' performance, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.543\*\*. This correlation was statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Peer group learning environment has a significant positive impact on learners' performance. A conducive and supportive learning environment within the peer group contributes to better academic performance.

Overall, these findings suggest that peer group learning environments are important determinants of learners' performance in primary schools within Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement.

### Discussions

During the formative adolescent years, peer groups are

arguably even more important than parents, teachers, and counselors, and the peer group-influenced decisions of youth can have long-lasting consequences (McCoy et al., 2019). Parents recognize the importance of Peer groups and through their choice of neighborhoods, schools, and activities attempt to guide and direct their Children’s friendship selections, which can be increasingly challenging during school (Zakaria et al., 2022). Regardless of socioeconomic status, parents want their children to be surrounded by the best possible social networks, especially during adolescence, when youth are increasingly independent from parents(Narr et al., 2019) The mentioned study focuses on the influence of peer groups on youth decision-making and the consequences of those decisions. It highlights the understanding that during

adolescence, peer groups play a crucial role in shaping individual behavior and outcomes.

In the context of settlement camps, where learners are often placed near one another, peer groups can have a significant impact on their performance. Settlement camps are temporary or semi-permanent communities where displaced individuals, such as refugees or internally displaced persons, reside.

In settlement camps, learners may come from diverse backgrounds and face unique challenges. The establishment of positive and supportive peer groups within these camps can contribute to improved learning outcomes for the children. Positive peer groups can provide a sense of belonging, emotional support, and motivation, all of which are important for academic success.

Parents, despite their difficult circumstances, still strive to guide and direct their children's friendship selections. They recognize that being surrounded by the right social networks, even in settlement camps, can positively influence their children's academic performance. Parents may try to choose schools with quality education, engage their children in activities that foster positive peer relationships, and create a sense of community within the settlement camps.

However, it is important to note that settlement camps may also present unique challenges for the formation of positive peer groups. The diverse backgrounds and traumatic experiences of the individuals in the camps can sometimes lead to conflicts and social tensions among peers. Therefore, it becomes crucial to implement strategies and interventions that promote positive peer dynamics, conflict resolution, and inclusive environments within settlement camps.

In summary, the study's findings regarding the importance of peer groups and parental efforts to guide their children's friendship selections are relevant to settlement camps. Creating positive peer groups within these camps can have a significant impact on learners' performance, despite the challenging circumstances they may face.

### **Summary of findings on group learning peer environment influences learners' performance in primary schools within Rhino Camp Refuge Settlement.**

The statement "Group learning fosters a favorable learning environment" had a mean score of 4.3, indicating that participants on average agreed that group learning creates a favorable environment for supporting each other in understanding difficult topics. The low standard deviation (0.3) suggests that there was a high level of agreement among the participants.

The statement "Group learning encourages active participation" had a mean score of 4.1, indicating that participants on average agreed that group learning promotes active participation among learners. The higher standard deviation (0.5) suggests that there might be some variation in participants' opinions.

The statement "Learning in a peer environment enhances motivation" had a mean score of 4.2, indicating that

participants on average agreed that learning in a peer environment boosts learners' motivation. However, the higher standard deviation (0.6) suggests that there might be some variation in participants' opinions.

The statement "Group discussions, presentations, and collaborative projects improve communication skills" had a mean score of 4.6, indicating that participants on average agreed that through these activities, learners can develop and enhance their communication skills. The low standard deviation (0.4) suggests a high level of agreement among the participants.

The statement "Group learning provides an opportunity for cultural understanding" had a mean score of 4.1, indicating that participants on average agreed that group learning allows learners to interact with peers from different cultures, fostering cultural understanding. The low standard deviation (0.2) suggests a high level of agreement among the participants.

The statement "Group learning provides emotional support" had a mean score of 4.3, indicating that participants on average agreed that group learning in a peer environment can provide emotional support, especially in a refugee camp. The higher standard deviation (0.5) suggests that there might be some variation in participants' opinions.

In conclusion, the data suggests that group learning in a peer environment has a positive influence on learners' performance in primary schools within Rhino Camp Refuge Settlement. It fosters a favorable learning environment, promotes active participation, enhances motivation, improves communication skills, fosters cultural understanding, and provides emotional support. These findings highlight the potential benefits of implementing group learning strategies in primary schools in refugee settlements.

### **Summary of findings on correlation**

There was a positive correlation between peer group learning environment and learners' performance, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.543\*\*. This correlation was statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Peer group learning environment has a significant positive impact on learners' performance. A conducive and supportive learning environment within the peer group contributes to better academic performance.

Overall, these findings suggest that peer group factors, such as prior achievements, compositions, and learning environment, are important determinants of learners' performance in primary schools within Rhino Camp Refuge Settlement.

### **Conclusions**

There was a relationship between peer groups and learners' performance in primary schools within Rhino Camp Refuge Settlement.

### **Recommendations**

i) Schools should create a conducive learning environment that promotes peer interaction and mutual learning.

ii) Promote peer learning opportunities: Implement peer learning strategies and activities that encourage students to learn from and with each other. Peer tutoring, study groups, and group projects can enhance academic performance by promoting knowledge exchange and collaborative problem-solving.

iii) Encourage parental involvement: Involve parents in supporting their children's peer group interactions and academic performance. Parents can be encouraged to participate in school activities, attend parent-teacher meetings, and provide guidance and support at home.

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