Janak: A Journal of Humanities
"An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal"
(I S S N : 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2) Volume: 01, Issue: 02, November, 2025
Available on https://janakajournal.in/index.php/1/about

The Academic Ripple Effect: How Peer Networks Influence Study Behavior, Educational Goals and Classroom Activities

Dr. Suvidha Sharma
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
Bareilly College, Bareilly.
E-mail- sunsuvi@gmail.com

Abstract

The study involves the effects of peer networks on the academic performance of students in the Rohilkhand area of Uttar Pradesh, India. It narrows down to examine how peer associations influence study habits, education goals and classroom interaction. The paper is based on the principles of social learning and socialization and aims at resolving the issue of different academic paths in similar socioeconomic settings. A sequential mixed-methods design was adopted, which involved the use of a structured survey (N=120) and semi-structured interview (n=25) of 16-19 year old students who were enrolled in schools and colleges in Bareilly. These findings verified a statistically significant impact of peer networks. Students who were in academically oriented peer groups reported more disciplined study habits (2=18.24, p=0.001), more education ambitions (t=5.67, p=0.001) and more engagement in the classroom. The qualitative analysis identified the following important mechanisms: collaborative learning (padhai in a group), aspiration modelling (I see that they want to be high), and normative social influence (the pressure to keep up). One of the alarming results was the adverse ripple effect found on students who were members of disengaged networks who expressed reduced desires. The research concludes that peer networks represent a very important, but often disregarded, socio-academic factor. It suggests educational strategies including the structured peer mentoring, collaborative pedagogy to leverage such influence to positively affect academic growth especially where resources are limited to specific regions.

Keywords: *Peer networks, Academic socialization, Educational aspirations, Study habits, Classroom engagement, Rohilkhand, Mixed-methods research*

INTRODUCTION

In the multifaceted system of student development, formal education is just one of the aspects of the larger learning context. A equally powerful informal power, working on the peer network, the web of acquaintances and friend networks that make up the social environment of a student, brings as powerful an effect. Although the influence of family and teachers has been well established, the impact of peers on academic behavior, ambition and engagement is a dynamic and context driven process. Uttar Pradesh is particularly unique to the socio-educational topography in the Rohilkhand area. It is typified by a contrast between the fast-urbanizing centers like Bareilly and the rural areas around them, which also generate high levels of academic competition on limited places in the desirable government colleges and professional course programs. In such a

Author:- Suvidha Sharma
Email:- sunsuvi@gmail.com
Received:- 05 September, 2025
Accepted:- 22 November, 2025.
Available online:- 30 November, 2025
Published by JSSCES, Bareilly

Janak: A Journal of Humanities
"An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal"
(I S S N : 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2) Volume: 01, Issue: 02, November, 2025
Available on https://janakajournal.in/index.php/1/about

stressful environment, peer networks could be the most important sources of academic support, modelling and motivation to the students or the other way around and hence the source of distraction and inattentiveness. This paper assumes that peer influence serves as an academic ripple effect, i.e., norms, behaviours and aspirations in one social group spread down to its members so that, in effect, these influence academic patterns of individuals significantly. The current research attempts to research systematically the nature and magnitude of this ripple effect on three fundamental academic outcomes, study habits, educational aspirations, and classroom engagement, of the higher-secondary and undergraduate student populations in Rohilkhand.

Review of Literature

This study is theoretically based on the Social Learning Theory developed by Albert Bandura (1977), which argues that people learn behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions by observing and imitating and modelling in the social environment. Students in the learning institutions become the main prototypes. The concept of academic socialization adds value to this framework in which peers pass on norms, values and strategies that are relevant to education (Wentzel and Caldwell, 1997). The strength of peer effects is always shown empirically it has been proven that peers can influence academic choice and performance (Sacerdote, 2011). Students whose placement is among very high performing peer groups are more likely to perform at higher levels which can be attributed to the mechanisms which include common norms, cooperative learning, and increased expectations. Affiliation with apathetic peers, on the contrary, has a negative impact on grades and a high risk of dropouts (Ryan, 2001).

According to the literature, there are three major paths of peer influence that pertain to this investigation:

Behavioural Channels: Peers have a direct impact on study behaviour by influencing study behaviour through collaborative work, sharing resources and normative behavioural development about the time spent studying.

Aspirational Channels: Peer network serves as a reference group to educational aspirations. In accordance with the observations of Bandura (1977), when people see individuals familiar with them accomplish things using constant effort, they will increase the information of the observers that they can accomplish similar tasks (p. 195). This is a vicarious experience, and this makes all the difference in aspirations.

Engagement Channels: Classroom engagement, whereby it comes in form of participation, attention and interest is socially mediated. When students involve themselves in conversations with their friends, there are greater chances of creating a classroom atmosphere that is either an academic hotbed or a classroom non-particular atmosphere.

Despite such observations, there is still a huge gap in the cultural and geographical contextualization of such mechanisms. Majority of the seminal studies establish themselves in the Western, individualistic education systems. The peer influence process can be enhanced or have different forms in collectivist societies where social connections are strong, and family or societal demands are high, i.e., India. The importance of peers in the competitive, resource-limited, Rohilkhand environment is understudied. This paper, therefore, attempts to bridge this gap by bringing the theories to this area of the region.

Janak: A Journal of Humanities
"An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal"
(I S S N : 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2) Volume: 01, Issue: 02, November, 2025
Available on https://janakajournal.in/index.php/1/about

Methodology

An explanatory mixed-methods design in a sequence (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017) was used. Here, the method involved initially gathering and analyzing the quantitative survey data on a general sample, thus establishing patterns and hypothesis testing. This was followed by the qualitative interview data coming through a purposive sub-sample that would explain, elaborate and provide more details to the quantitative results. This two-step model helped to perceive holistically the what, i.e. prevalence and correlation, and the why, processes and lived experiences, of peer influence.

Statement of the Problem

Although the students in the Rohilkhand region are working under similar institutional and socioeconomic settings, the academic behaviours, aspirations, and the degree of engagement of the students are notably different. Although it is understood that family background, quality of school and the personal aptitude play a role, limited understanding is made as to whether the immediate peer environment can be a potential trigger or inhibitor of academic development. It is a significant issue to teachers and policy-makers, since an unmanaged detrimental peer pressure can render pedagogical activities ineffective and cycles of poor performance. On the other hand, not having deliberate plans to develop a beneficial peer impact is a failure to harness a strong, natural resource to the advantage of academic performance.

Research Hypotheses

According to the theoretical framework, the hypotheses were the following:

H 1: Students who say that they have most academically oriented peers will display much more disciplined and organized study habits compared to those with less academically oriented peers.

H 2: The perceived educational aspirations of the peer network have a positive relationship with the personal educational aspirations.

H3: It will be established that students who have academic-oriented interactions with other students (e.g., group study, discussion of concepts) will report greater classroom engagement.

Variables

Independent Variable: Composition and quality of peer network. This was operationalised as a percentage of close friends being studious (peer academic orientation) and as a percentage of close friends collaborating in studying (academic peer interaction).

Dependent Variables:

-**Study Habits:** Assessed by personally reported hours of individual study, regularity of study schedule, as well as whether active learning strategies were used.

-**Educational Aspirations:** Determined by the highest level of desired degree (e.g., BA, MA, PhD) and the perceived feasibility of career ambitions (e.g., engineer, doctor, civil servant).

-**Classroom: Engagement:** This indicator is measured using self-reported frequency of questioning, discussing, and listening during a lecture.

Sample

A sample of 120 students (60 males and 60 females) were selected purposely in ninth-grade, twelfth-grade, and first-year undergraduate programs in three institutions (one government school, one

Janak: A Journal of Humanities
"An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal"
(I S S N : 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2) Volume: 01, Issue: 02, November, 2025
Available on https://janakajournal.in/index.php/1/about

private school and one degree college) in Bareilly, Rohilkhand. The age range was 16-19 years. This multispecialized sampling was to be used to measure socioeconomic and academic diversity. Out of the survey respondents, 25 of them were randomly chosen to be interviewed in depth according to the Survey responses, which is a continuum of peer network types (highly academic, mixed, and non-academic).

Tests/Measures Used

Peer Academic Influence Scale (PAIS): The 20-item survey, with a 5-point Likert scale, was developed by a researcher. Part of the questions evaluated peer academic orientation (e.g., "Most of my close friends are serious about their studies), frequency of academic interactions, perceived peer aspirations and personal study habits, aspirations, and engagement. The alpha of the scale was 0.84.

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol: Conversations with questions about the nature of peer interactions, accounts of how other people influenced certain academic choices and how friends influence their attitudes towards schoolwork and future aspirations.

Statistical Techniques Used

Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize the sample characteristics and the key variables.

Inferential Statistics:

- **Chi-square Test:** H 0 The relationship between peer academic orientation (categorical: High/Low), disciplined study habits (categorical: Yes/No).

- **Independent Samples t -test:** It was used to compare mean aspiration score between high-aspiration peer network students and low-aspiration peer network students (connected with H 2).

- **Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r):** This test is applied to determine the strength and direction of the association between the frequency of academic peer interaction (continuous) and classroom engagement scores (continuous) to test H 3.

Thematic Analysis: Interview transcripts were addressed through the six-phase technique of analyzing by Braun and Clarke (2006) to reveal common themes of the processes of peer influence.

Results

Quantitative Findings:

Table 1: Association between Peer Academic Orientation and Disciplined Study Habits (N=120)

Peer Academic Orientation	Disciplined Study Habits	No Disciplined Habits	Row Total
High	42	18	60
Low	22	38	60
Column Total	64	56	120

Interpretation: The analysis supports hypothesis H 0. Embedded students in cohorts with a strong academic orientation are significantly more likely to report structured study behaviors (such as following a fixed schedule and having focused study periods) than their peers that are associated with cohorts that are not significantly academically oriented.

Janak: A Journal of Humanities
"An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal"
(I S S N : 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2) Volume: 01, Issue: 02, November, 2025
Available on https://janakajournal.in/index.php/1/about

Table 2: Comparison of Educational Aspiration Scores by Peer Network Aspiration Level

Group	*N*	*Mean Aspiration Score (1-10)*	*Std. Deviation*
High-Aspiration Peer Network	58	8.45	1.12
Low-Aspiration Peer Network	62	6.82	1.67

Interpretation: Hypothesis H 2 is strongly supported by the analysis. In contrast to those who did not, perceived peer network with high aspirations resulted in high scores of personal educational aspiration, indicating that there is quite a strong relation between the perceived peer aspirations and educational goals of the individual.

Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation was calculated to study the relationship between the number of academic interactions with peers and the scores of classroom engagement. The findings indicated that the correlation between them was statistically significant and positive: r(118) =.61, p <.001. This observation supports hypothesis H 3, which states that the more an individual academically interacts with peers, the more self-reported classroom engagement.

Qualitative Findings:

Thematic analysis of the interviews gave deep, contextual information to the statistical findings, showing three fundamental processes of the so-called ripple effect. Collaborative Learning as a Behavioral Catalyst proved to be a major tool of developing better study habits. Discipline was externalized through the practice of group padhai (group study) which instigated structure, responsibility and common resources. On my part I become distracted after an hour as Priya (Female, 17) put it in her words. However, in the evenings, we get together in the library with my two friends. We interrogate one another, work out problems together. Since they are relying on me, I turn up ready, and this is how peer networks can be an effective encouragement to long-term participation.

Aspiration Modeling and Social Proof served as living experiments of futures that can be achieved. The goal was made easier when one of my best friends applied to an engineering seat in one of the national institutes. Rohan (Male, 18) related his experience to a typical instance of the vicarious learning and said, "My friend Ankit, his brother is in IIT-Bombay. Ankit studies eight hours a day in preparation for the JEE. I believed in great city geniuses only before I got to know him. And now, when I see him, I imagine I can give it a go also. This example shows how social proof could enhance self-efficacy and expand academic possibilities.

Normative Influence to Engagement influenced classroom behavior socially. When question-asking was the norm in the network, the participation in the network became significantly higher. On the other hand, students were likely to be silent in groups where they considered that questioning was regarded as show-off behavior. Kavita (Female, 19) managed to sum this dynamic up in a sentence: in my group of friends, when a person answers too many questions, other people would tease them by saying, Oh, teacher pet! Even when I have the answer, I tend to remain silent of course to not stand out. This highlights the effective influence of peer norms in classroom participation.

Janak: A Journal of Humanities
"An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal"
(I S S N : 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2) Volume: 01, Issue: 02, November, 2025
Available on https://janakajournal.in/index.php/1/about

Another important and worrying sub-theme came out as the adverse ripple effect. Networked students who internalized network attitudes on dismissiveness of academics excised study ambition. Vikram (Male, 17) brought out this erosion by saying, my friends say, What is the point? Even here, a MA holder drives rickshaws even here. At times, we defy classes to visit the market. It is like a futile attempt to do so, when the people surrounding you are not. This testimonial shows that peer networks can kill, and not setting fire to, scholarly ambitions.

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study supports the claim that peer networks are an influential force on the academic scene within the Rohilkhand region, and leave a strong sense of a ripple effect that penetrates the study behaviors, aspirations and involvement of the student. The statistical data strongly supports all the three hypotheses hence creating definite statistical correlations between the contextual variables of peers and individual academic performance. The qualitative results explain the socio-psychological processes behind this influence, collaboration, modeling, and normative pressure.

The consequences of these results are far-fetched. To begin with, teachers should realize that the achievements of a student in studies are not only the result of personal efforts but also the reflection of his/her microclimate within society. Second, the vicious effect described has to be addressed proactively; teaching students about the inherent worth of education is simply not sufficient when the opposite social pressure comes in the form of an inactive group of peers.

Thus, our suggestions are specific measures to utilize the positive peer influence:

Structured Peer Mentoring Programs: With an explicitly defined set of academic aims toward which both teams are directed, we can create new positive social relationships by matching high-engagement students with disengaged students.

Pedagogy of Collaboration: Designing the curriculum in such a way that it intrinsically requires positive interdependence among peers, such as group projects, peer review and cooperative problem-solving, is useful in formalising and directing beneficial academic interaction.

Development of Aspirational Models: The presentation of the success stories of former students and senior students, particularly those who have come out of similar regional backgrounds, will help to strengthen social evidence among the student body, and make high aspirations more normalized and possible.

To sum it up, the academic ripple effect, which is evident in Rohilkhand, is a powerful fact. Using a social-ecological approach rather than an individual-deficit paradigm, teachers and policymakers are able to craft the peer environment strategically. It must not be to discourage peer influence but rather to purposely create and nurture it as a self-sustaining, internally driven propellant of academic self-resilience and aspiration, and hence produce ripple effects of beneficial change on the educational environment throughout the region.

References:

1. Bandura, A. (1977). Social learning theory. Prentice Hall.
2. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

3. Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017). Designing and conducting mixed methods research (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
4. Ryan, A. M. (2001). The peer group as a context for the development of young adolescent motivation and achievement. Child Development, 72(4), 1135–1150. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00338
5. Sacerdote, B. (2011). Peer effects in education: How might they work, how big are they and how much do we know thus far? In E. A. Hanushek, S. Machin, & L. Woessmann (Eds.), Handbook of the Economics of Education (Vol. 3, pp. 249–277). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-444-53429-3.00004-1
6. Wentzel, K. R., & Caldwell, K. (1997). Friendships, peer acceptance, and group membership: Relations to academic achievement in middle school. Child Development, 68(6), 1198–1209. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1997.tb01994.x