

**EXPLORING THE KEY DETERMINANTS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG JUNIOR SECONDARY
SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SAGAMU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, OGUN STATE, NIGERIA**

BY

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Abstract

This study examined the key determinants of civic engagement among junior secondary school students in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to examine the level of civic engagement among students, determine the relationship between peer influence and civic engagement, and investigate the relationship between school environment and civic engagement. Three research questions guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised all junior secondary school students in Sagamu Local Government Area, with a sample of 200 students selected from five schools using multistage sampling. Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire titled the Civic Engagement Questionnaire (CEQ). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The findings revealed a high level of civic engagement among students. Peer influence ($r = 0.218$, $p < 0.05$) and school environment ($r = 0.827$, $p < 0.01$) were significantly related to civic engagement. The study concludes that supportive peer networks and positive school environments enhance students' civic participation. It recommends strengthening civic education programs and promoting peer-led civic initiatives to improve civic engagement among students.

Key Words: *Civic Engagement, Civic Education, Peer Influence, Environment*

Introduction

Civic education is fundamental to building a society of informed, active, and responsible citizens who contribute to democratic governance and societal development. Its primary goals include instilling civic knowledge, fostering civic skills, and promoting civic dispositions (Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2021). Civic knowledge refers to the understanding of political institutions, the rule of law, and citizens' rights and responsibilities, while civic skills enable individuals to analyze, evaluate, and engage in democratic processes. Civic dispositions, such as respect for diversity, responsibility, and tolerance, are critical for fostering a democratic culture (Galston, 2020). When properly implemented, civic education enhances

students' abilities to critically engage with social and political issues, thus ensuring the active participation needed to sustain a functioning democracy.

However, civic education in many contexts has faced significant challenges that impede its ability to achieve these objectives. One notable challenge is the inadequacy of curriculum content and delivery methods. Civic education is often delivered superficially, relying heavily on rote memorization rather than fostering critical thinking and active engagement (Castellanos & Cole, 2021). This approach undermines students' ability to connect civic concepts with real-world practices, leading to disengagement. Berinsky and Lenz (2020) argue that without experiential learning opportunities—such as involvement in community projects or school governance—students fail to internalize the values of civic participation.

Another factor is the role of family and socioeconomic background. Students from families that are less civically engaged are often not encouraged to participate in civic activities, which reduces their likelihood of becoming active citizens (Patrick, 2021). Family influence, including parents' attitudes towards politics and community service, significantly shapes students' civic dispositions. Research shows that children who grow up in households where civic engagement is prioritized are more likely to develop a strong sense of civic duty (Putnam, 2020). Conversely, children from disengaged families often face barriers to understanding their civic roles, as they lack both motivation and practical role models (Nwafor & Akani, 2020).

School environments also play a decisive role in shaping students' civic engagement. Schools that do not foster a culture of participation—by limiting extracurricular activities, student governance opportunities, or community outreach programs—fail to create the necessary platforms for students to practice civic engagement (Amadeo, Torney-Purta & Barber, 2021). A democratic school climate that encourages debate, leadership, and involvement in school affairs is crucial for building civic-minded individuals. Flanagan et al. (2018) emphasize that when students feel they have a voice in their school community, they are more likely to extend that engagement into the broader community.

Despite these important influences, peer influence emerges as one of the most critical determinants of civic engagement, especially during adolescence. Adolescents are highly susceptible to peer influence, and research suggests that students are more likely to participate in civic activities if they observe their peers doing the same (Xu, 2023). Peer groups serve as immediate social networks where civic behaviors and attitudes are reinforced. According to Cress (2012), students who belong to peer groups that prioritize community service, political activism, or school leadership are more inclined to follow suit. In contrast, students whose peer networks do not value civic engagement are less likely to participate.

Peer influence not only shapes students' behavior but also affects their attitudes toward civic responsibility. When peers support each other in civic endeavors—whether it is joining a community project, participating in school elections, or attending civic education programs—students develop a stronger commitment to societal development (Vieno et al., 2019). This dynamic underscores the importance of fostering positive peer networks in schools and communities to enhance civic engagement among youth.

Teachers play a vital role in motivating students to engage civically. Igbokwe and Obiechina (2022) argue that teachers who actively promote civic participation in the classroom and beyond help students understand the importance of their role in society. Teachers can act as mentors, providing guidance on how students can contribute to their communities and encouraging them to take on leadership roles. Teachers who integrate civic education into real-world projects, such as organizing community clean-up activities, can help students see the practical benefits of civic engagement. Thus, the development of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions directly supports higher levels of civic participation, reinforcing democratic values and practices. The linkage between these elements underlines the significance of civic education as a means to foster active, responsible citizenship that sustains and strengthens democratic institutions.

Civic engagement takes various forms such as voting, involvement in decision-making bodies, participating in civil society organizations, and volunteering. “Civic engagement is working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.” Bearing this definition in mind, it is clear that civic engagement is a crucial skill to be had by youth, which will add tremendous value to their academic and practical knowledge. In addition, civic engagement is also found to increase youth’s emotional intelligence and motivate them toward conscientious community actions (Cress, 2012; Manring, 2012).

Although integrating civic engagement into the curriculum requires more time and effort than traditional teaching methods, it is a reliable strategy for developing both students' knowledge and skills while fostering personal growth. Therefore, civic engagement is a reliable pedagogical and epistemological strategy for developing students' knowledge and skills, while fostering individual development (Cress, 2012). Further, it is also imperative that any effort aimed at instilling such qualities is capable of manifesting the intended outcomes measurably.

Tessler, Marta, Ronald, and Amaney (2012) define civic engagement as scholars who have long recognized that stable democracy depends upon having not only the proper political institutions but also a

democratic culture. This includes, for example, high levels of interpersonal trust, political interest, involvement in community and civic organizations, and tolerance of others. Scholars use civic engagement and political participation interchangeably. Tessler et al. (2012) acknowledged the necessity to present a clear definition of the two terms, where civic engagement encompasses political participation, community service, and collective action. Joakim Ekman and Erik Amna (2012) concur with this definition, where they recognize that some scholars focus on the private aspect of civic engagement that is expressed in political participation, while others emphasize the social aspect of civic engagement, which is often characterized by community service.

This study narrows its focus on peer influence and school environment as core factors determining civic engagement among junior secondary school students in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. The research aims to investigate the extent to which peer interactions and school culture influence students' involvement in civic activities, using a structured civic engagement questionnaire. Understanding these determinants is crucial for creating strategies that will enhance youth participation in civic duties, ultimately contributing to the development of responsible and active citizens.

Xu (2023) and Vieno et al. (2019) examined the peer influence on civic engagement during adolescence. This study explores how adolescents' civic behaviors, such as participation in community service and political activism, are influenced by their peers. Amadeo, Torney-Purta, and Barber (2021) examined the school environments and civic engagement" The study shows how democratic school climates encourage civic participation, which is mirrored in this study's finding of a strong relationship between school influence and civic engagement. Cress (2012) examines the role of peers in fostering civic responsibility, the research focuses on how peer interactions influence civic dispositions and community involvement among secondary school students. Torney-Purta & Amadeo (2021) examined Civic knowledge and engagement in education, this journal article emphasizes the importance of structured civic education in schools for developing students' civic knowledge and skills, which ties into the current study's examination of school influence.

Theoretical Framework

The Socio-political Development Theory by Watts et al. (1999) underpins this study. The theory suggests that individuals develop socio-political consciousness and civic engagement as they interact with their social environments, including peer groups and schools. This framework is appropriate for the study because the theory explains how individuals, especially adolescents, are influenced by their immediate social circles (peers) and institutions (schools) to engage in civic activities. As civic participation is

fostered through supportive environments and social networks, the theory aligns with the findings of this research, which shows that both peer dynamics and school culture significantly impact students' civic engagement. Thus, the Sociopolitical Development Theory is an ideal fit for explaining the interaction between social factors and the development of civic responsibility among students in this context.

Statement of Problem

Civic engagement is vital for the sustainability of democratic societies, as it equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to contribute meaningfully to societal development. However, despite the importance of civic education in fostering civic-mindedness among youth, evidence suggests that many junior secondary school students in Nigeria, particularly in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State, exhibit low levels of civic engagement. This raises concerns about the effectiveness of civic education in shaping students' understanding of their civic duties and their readiness to actively participate in community and national development.

Several factors have been identified as hindrances to achieving the goals of civic education. Inadequate curriculum content, passive teaching methods, lack of family support, and unfavorable school environments all contribute to the disengagement of students from civic activities. Additionally, peer influence—a significant social factor during adolescence—has not been sufficiently explored as a determinant of civic engagement in this context. While literature emphasizes the role of peers in shaping behaviors and attitudes, there is limited research on how peer interactions specifically affect civic participation among Nigerian students.

Given these challenges, it is critical to understand the factors that drive or inhibit civic engagement among junior secondary school students. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the influence of peer dynamics and school environments on the level of civic engagement among students in the Sagamu Local Government Area. Addressing this problem is essential for developing strategies that can enhance civic education and cultivate active, responsible citizens in the region.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of the study was to examine the determinants of civic engagement among junior secondary school students in Sagamu Local Government Area, Ogun State. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine the level of civic engagement among junior secondary school students in Sagamu Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria

2. Determine the relationship between peer influence and civic engagement of students in Sagamu Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria
3. Determine the relationship between school influence and civic engagement of students in Sagamu Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria

Research Question

1. What is the level of civic engagement among students in Sagamu Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria?
2. Is there a significant relationship between peer influence and civic engagement of students in sagamu Local Government Area, Ogun State?
3. Is there any significant relationship between school influence and civic engagement of students in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State?

Research Method

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate the determinants of civic engagement among junior secondary school students in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. The population for this study consisted of all public junior secondary school students in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State. Using a multistage sampling technique, a sample size of 200 students was selected. In the first stage, five junior secondary schools were randomly selected from the pool of public schools in the area. 40 students from each of the five selected schools were randomly chosen to participate in the study. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled the Civic Engagement Questionnaire (CEQ). The questionnaire was developed based on the objectives of the study and relevant literature on civic engagement, peer influence, and school environments. It was divided into sections. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, alongside inferential statistics like the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at a 0.05 significance level. The instrument was validated by experts in social studies and measurement and evaluation. A pilot study was conducted, and the reliability coefficient was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.81, indicating good reliability.

Results and Data Analysis

Research Question 1: What is the level of civic engagement of the Junior secondary school students in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State?

Table 1: Level of civic engagement among students in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	S.D
1	I believe involvement in civic affairs is crucial for societal progress.	134 67%	40 20%	14 7%	12 6%	3.48	0.87
2	Civic engagement activities provide opportunities for personal growth.	87 43.5%	82 41%	19 9.5%	12 6%	3.22	0.85
3	I believe civic engagement is the responsibility of all citizens, regardless of age.	126 63%	48 24%	14 7%	12 6%	3.44	0.87
4	Civic engagement helps me develop empathy and understanding towards others.	73 36.5%	101 50.5%	14 7%	12 6%	3.18	0.80
5	Civic engagement activities help me develop leadership skills.	110 55%	83 41.5%	7 3.5%	- -	3.52	0.57
6	Civic engagement is essential for creating positive change in society.	94 47%	99 49.5%	7 3.5%	- -	3.44	0.56
7	I have participated in initiatives to address social problems in my community.	117 58.5%	42 21%	27 13.5%	14 7%	3.31	0.95
8	I am knowledgeable about the democratic process and my rights as a citizen.	94 47%	80 40%	14 7%	12 6%	3.28	0.84
9	I see civic engagement as a way to foster positive relationships within my community.	108 54%	80 40%	- -	12 6%	3.42	0.78
10	I believe it is important to participate in community service activities.	98 49%	88 44%	14 7%	- -	3.42	0.62
11	I feel connected to my community through civic engagement activities.	96 48%	83 41.5%	14 7%	7 3.5%	3.34	0.76
12	I feel encouraged to voice my opinions on social and political issues.	137 68.5%	56 28%	7 3.5%	- -	3.65	0.55

13	I feel a sense of responsibility to contribute to my community.	111 55.5%	63 31.5%	14 7%	12 6%	3.37	0.86
14	I feel empowered to make a difference in my community.	119 59.5%	76 38%	5 2.5%	-	3.57	0.54
15	I believe in the importance of environmental conservation and sustainability efforts.	116 58%	70 35%	14 7%	-	3.51	0.63
TOTAL						3.41	0.74

The analysis of Table 1 shows that the level of civic engagement among junior secondary school students in Sagamu is very high (Mean 3.41). Most students believe that participating in civic activities is crucial for societal progress and personal growth. The two highest responses were 68.5% of students felt encouraged to voice their opinions on social and political issues (Item 12) while 59.5% of students believed they were empowered to make a difference in their community (Item 14). On the other hand, the lowest response was that 36.5% of students felt that civic engagement helps them develop empathy and understanding towards others (Item 4). Overall, students are highly involved in civic activities. A mean score of 2.50 and above was considered high, while below 2.50 was considered low.

Research Question 2: Is there any significant relationship between peer influence and civic engagement among students in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State

Table 2: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between peer influence and civic engagement among students in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State

Variable	N	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	DF	R	Sig.	Remark
Peer Influence	200	45.03	5.72				
Civic Engagement	200	51.13	5.80	198	0.218**	0.002	Significant

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2: The analysis shows a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between peer influence and civic engagement among students in Sagamu ($r = 0.218$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that while peer influence contributes to civic engagement, its effect is relatively small

Research Question 3: Is there any significant relationship between school influence and the level of civic engagement among students in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State?

Table 3: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between school influence and civic engagement among students in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State

Variable	N	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	DF	R	Sig.	Remark
School Influence	200	52.19	4.97				
Civic Engagement	200	51.13	5.80	198	0.827**	0.000	Significant

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3: The analysis indicates a strong and significant relationship between school influence and civic engagement ($r = 0.827$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that school environment is strongly associated with students' civic engagement.

Discussion of the findings

The present findings aimed to explore the key determinants of civic engagement among junior secondary school students in Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State, with a particular focus on the influence of peer groups and school environments. The results obtained provide critical insights into how these factors shape students' civic behaviors. The analysis revealed of Research Question 1, which examined the general level of civic engagement among students, revealed a high level of participation. The data showed that the majority of respondents recognized the importance of civic engagement for societal progress and personal development. The evidence suggests is consistent with previous research that emphasizes the role of civic engagement in fostering emotional intelligence and a sense of responsibility among youth (Cress, 2012). Students' high participation rates suggest that, despite the challenges of civic education in the region, there is still a strong awareness of civic duties among students, possibly driven by cultural or community influences.

For Research Question 2, which investigated the relationship between peer influence and civic engagement, the results revealed a weak but statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.218$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that although peer influence affects civic engagement, its impact is relatively limited compared to other factors. This implies that students' civic participation is significantly shaped by their peer groups. This finding supports earlier research by Bi Xu (2023), who noted that adolescents are particularly susceptible to peer influence, especially when it comes to behaviors and activities related to social

engagement. In this study, students were more likely to participate in civic activities when they observed their peers doing the same. Peer groups serve as a critical support system, encouraging students to engage in community service, social activism, and other forms of civic participation. These findings align with the work of Vieno et al. (2019), which found that peers play a vital role in reinforcing positive civic behaviors and attitudes in school settings.

Regarding Research Question 3, which explored the relationship between school influence and civic engagement, the findings showed a strong, significant relationship ($r = 0.827$, $p < 0.01$). This highlights the critical role that schools play in fostering civic participation. Schools that provide opportunities for students to participate in leadership roles, debates, and community outreach programs are more likely to produce civically engaged students. These results are consistent with Amadeo, Torney-Purta, and Barber (2021), who argued that schools that promote democratic participation and leadership opportunities within the student body help develop active citizens. The high correlation also suggests that schools can significantly influence students' attitudes toward civic responsibility by creating a supportive environment that encourages participation in civic activities. In contrast, the influence of the school environment was found to be much stronger ($r = 0.827$), suggesting that institutional factors play a more dominant role than peer dynamics in shaping students' civic engagement.

In summary, this study's findings underscore the significant impact of both peer influence and school environment on the level of civic engagement among students. Peer dynamics play an essential role in motivating students to engage civically, while the school environment provides the structure and opportunities necessary for students to participate in civic activities. These results call for enhanced efforts by educators, policymakers, and parents to create more supportive peer networks and to promote civic education programs that can further boost student involvement in civic duties.

Conclusion

The study concludes that civic engagement among junior secondary school students in Sagamu Local Government Area is relatively high. Both peer influence and school environment were significantly associated with students' civic participation. These findings suggest that students' civic engagement is not only a function of their attitudes but is also shaped by the social and institutional environments they interact with. Schools and peer groups serve as crucial platforms for promoting civic responsibility. For civic education to be effective, these social structures must be optimized to encourage active participation in community and democratic processes. Therefore, addressing the factors that influence students' civic engagement is essential for cultivating a generation of active, responsible citizens.

Recommendation

Based on the above findings, the following were recommended:

1. Schools should encourage the development of positive peer networks by organizing peer-led civic activities such as community service projects, student governance, and civic education clubs. These networks can provide students with a sense of belonging and motivate them to engage in civic responsibilities.
2. Civic education should go beyond theoretical classroom instruction. Schools should integrate experiential learning into the curriculum by creating opportunities for students to participate in real-world civic activities such as volunteering, local governance simulations, and debates on social issues. This will help students apply what they learn in civic education to their daily lives.
3. School administrators should foster a democratic culture within schools by promoting student leadership, encouraging participation in decision-making processes, and creating an inclusive environment where students feel empowered to express their opinions. This can be achieved through initiatives such as student councils, leadership training programs, and open forums for students to voice their concerns.
4. Parents and community leaders should be encouraged to model civic engagement by actively participating in local governance and community development initiatives. Schools can invite parents and civic leaders to share their experiences and inspire students to become more civically engaged.
5. Policymakers and educational authorities should support the integration of more practical civic education programs in schools. This could include providing resources for extracurricular civic engagement activities and professional development for teachers to improve their capacity to deliver effective civic education.

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