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Investigate the impact of students' social interactions and peer support on academic performance in secondary schools in Rwanda

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of peer interactions—specifically, exclusion, lack of cooperation, and peer pressure—on student engagement, behaviour, and academic performance in secondary school. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combined qualitative interviews with students, teachers, and school leaders alongside quantitative surveys. A total of 268 students, 94 teachers, and 30 school leaders from various secondary schools in Rwanda participated in the study. The data were analysed using inferential statistics, graphical representations, triangulation, and thematic analysis. The findings show key patterns: 54% of students report experiencing exclusion as "occasional" (mean = 3.1, SD = 1.3), with 16% feeling excluded as "often" (mean = 3.0, SD = 1.4). Furthermore, 31% of students exhibit social withdrawal (mean = 2.3, SD = 1.1), and 48% miss collaborative opportunities (mean = 2.3, standard deviation = 1.2). Additionally, 41% face challenges accessing peer support (mean = 2.6, SD = 1.0), and 33% struggle with group collaboration (mean = 2.6, SD = 1.0). Furthermore, 47% feel their contributions are not valued (mean = 2.5, SD = 1.0), and 34% experience social exclusion during class activities (mean = 2.4, SD = 1.2). Concerning academic performance, female students outperform their male counterparts, with 94.83% of females passing compared to 38.82% of males. Boarding students also performed better, with 92.79% meeting the minimum passing standard compared to 42.04% of day students. These findings highlight the significant link between social dynamics, peer pressure, and academic success. The study highlights the need for inclusive environments, peer support programs, and targeted interventions to address the challenges students face.

Keywords: Social Interactions, Social Exclusion, Lack of Cooperation, Peer pressure and Academic Performance

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Statement of the Problem

Academic achievement remains a cornerstone of educational systems worldwide, driven by the recognition that various factors contribute to student performance (Maity et al., 2024). These factors range from cognitive abilities to emotional, psychological, and social influences. Among the most pivotal of these influences are peer relationships and social interactions (Shao et al., 2024). A growing body of research underscores the

positive effects of peer support on student outcomes, highlighting that students who engage in supportive peer interactions tend to show higher levels of motivation, engagement, and academic success (Gilar-Corbi et al., 2024; Shao et al., 2024). Specifically, positive peer dynamics, such as collaboration, trust, and mutual support, foster a sense of belonging and emotional security, both of which are linked to improved academic

achievement (Wentzel, 2017; Ryan & Shin, 2018).

Collaborative learning environments where students engage in problem-solving tasks and share knowledge are also found to enhance cognitive and social development (Williams & Downing, 2016). These interactions promote critical thinking, communication skills, and the development of a strong academic identity, all crucial for success in school. Students who feel connected to their peers are more likely to participate in both academic and extracurricular activities, which ultimately contributes to their academic performance (Juvonen, Espinoza, & Knifsend, 2012).

However, a significant gap exists in the literature when examining the negative aspects of peer interactions. While much of the research has focused on the positive effects of peer relationships, less attention has been paid to the detrimental impacts of poor peer dynamics, such as bullying, exclusion, peer pressure, and social isolation (Stahel et al., 2024; Dissanayake et al., 2012). Negative peer interactions can lead to emotional distress, disengagement, and a decline in academic performance. Studies, such as those by Wang and Chen (2023), emphasise that students subjected to negative peer dynamics often experience anxiety, reduced self-esteem, and poor academic results. Furthermore, Brown, Clasen, and Eicher (1986) found that peer pressure often leads to negative behaviours like substance abuse and truancy, which significantly detracts from academic success. These findings indicate the importance of addressing negative peer interactions as a crucial aspect of understanding the full scope of factors influencing academic achievement.

While the broader literature has increasingly explored both the positive and negative impacts of peer relationships on academic outcomes, much less research has been conducted in the Rwandan context, especially regarding the negative effects of peer interactions. Dissanayake et al. (2012). Rwanda, still recovering from the traumatic effects of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, presents a unique educational environment where the psychological and emotional well-being of students is influenced by historical and socio-cultural factors. The long-term impact of the genocide has left many students grappling with trauma, anxiety, and social instability, which often manifest as disruptive behaviours in the classroom (Niyibizi & Nzabonimpa, 2017). These emotional burdens are compounded by poverty, social exclusion, and family instability, all of which can create barriers to learning and academic engagement (Rwanda Education Board, 2018; Mugenzi, 2017).

Despite these challenges, there is a notable lack of research in Rwanda specifically exploring the negative aspects of peer relationships and how they affect academic performance. Studies in Rwanda have primarily focused on positive peer support and student engagement, but there is limited exploration of how negative peer dynamics, such as exclusion or peer pressure, contribute to students' academic struggles. The Rwanda Social Development Fund (2017) and the Rwanda Teachers' Union (2019) have highlighted the negative effects of peer pressure, bullying, and exclusion, but these studies are often descriptive rather than analytical in nature, leaving a gap in understanding the causal relationship between these negative peer dynamics and academic performance.

Additionally, studies conducted by the Rwanda Education Board (2012) and Nsengiyumva & Uwizeyimana (2022) emphasise the high dropout rates, behavioural problems, and mental health challenges among Rwandan students; yet these studies largely focus on general trends and behaviours without investigating the specific role of peer relationships in shaping these outcomes. The emotional and psychological difficulties faced by students in the aftermath of the genocide, compounded by modern stressors like poverty and family conflict, are likely significant contributors to academic disengagement and low achievement. However, these factors are often not explored in depth in existing research.

Furthermore, the ongoing mental health crisis among students, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has further disrupted social dynamics and heightened the importance of peer support. in academic settings. Research on this issue has primarily focused on mental health or academic achievement in isolation, leaving a clear gap in understanding how peer relationships—both positive and negative—affect students' ability to succeed academically in the post-genocide context (Mukantwali et al., 2024; Twesige et al., 2021; Rwanda Biomedical Centre, 2020).

This research seeks to fill this gap by examining the negative effects of peer dynamics such as bullying, exclusion, and peer pressure on students' academic performance in Rwandan secondary schools. While much has been explored regarding positive peer support, the specific impact of negative peer interactions on academic disengagement and underachievement in Rwanda remains under-examined. Given the historical trauma, socio-economic challenges, and mental health issues prevalent in Rwandan schools, understanding the full scope of peer dynamics is crucial for improving educational outcomes. This research will not only contribute to the broader understanding of peer influences on academic success but also inform policy interventions aimed at fostering a supportive, inclusive school environment for all students.

1.2 Objectives

The study will be driven by the following three objectives:
i)   To investigate how negative peer interactions, such as exclusion, peer pressure and lack of cooperation affect disruptive behavior among Rwandan

students.

ii)   To assess the influence of negative peer dynamics, including withdrawal, exclusion, and lack of cooperation, on students' academic performance in Rwandan secondary schools.

iii)   To identify strategies for mitigating the negative impact of poor peer interactions on student performance and fostering positive peer relationships within secondary schools in Rwanda.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic achievement is shaped by numerous factors, with peer relationships emerging as one of the most influential. Research highlights that positive peer interactions marked by support, collaboration, and mutual respect significantly enhance students' motivation, engagement, and academic success (Wentzel, 2017; Ryan & Shin, 2018). Collaborative learning environments driven by positive peer dynamics foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential for academic development (Williams & Downing, 2016). Moreover, when students experience a sense of belonging through supportive peer networks, they are more likely to participate actively in school, contributing to better academic outcomes.

In contrast, negative peer interactions such as bullying, exclusion, and peer pressure have detrimental effects on academic performance. Such experiences often result in emotional distress, disengagement, and reduced self-esteem, which can hinder students' learning and academic progress (Wentzel, 2017). Peer pressure that promotes behaviours like truancy and substance abuse further disrupts the educational environment and undermines academic achievement (Brown et al., 1986).

While there is substantial research on the benefits of positive peer relationships, less attention has been given to the negative impacts, particularly within the Rwandan educational context. Despite Rwanda's ongoing efforts to promote inclusive and engaging learning environments, there remains a significant gap in understanding how harmful peer dynamics affect student outcomes. Addressing this gap is important when creating targeted interventions to support students facing social and emotional challenges.

Academic performance is defined as the measurable outcomes of a student's learning, commonly assessed through tests, grades, or national examination results (National Research Council, 2012). In this study, performance is evaluated using students' academic results across three school terms, reflecting the cumulative outcome of their educational experiences and social influences.

In our study, students' academic performance was evaluated based on the cumulative results of their exams over two years (S1 and S2). The marks were adjusted according to the standards set by NESA as follows:

Table 1: Academic Performance Grading Standards Based on Cumulative Exam Results

Percentage	Letter grade	Descriptor
80-100	A	Excellence
75-79	B	Very good
70-74	C	Good
65-69	D	Satisfactory
60-64	E	Adequate
50-59	S	Minimum Pass
0-49	F	Fail

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two key theories: Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Social learning theory emphasises how peer interactions shape behaviour and attitudes. Positive peer relationships encourage behaviours like academic motivation and engagement, leading to improved academic outcomes. Conversely, negative interactions, such as bullying or exclusion, reinforce harmful behaviours, causing disengagement and lower performance. Self-Determination Theory focuses on how fulfilling basic psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – affects motivation and well-being. Positive peer relationships foster a sense of belonging, boosting intrinsic motivation and academic success. On the other hand, negative interactions undermine students' sense of belonging, reducing their motivation and academic achievement. Together, these theories provide a framework for understanding how both positive and negative peer dynamics influence students' academic performance through their impact on motivation, behaviour, and engagement.

2.2 Variables

Table 2: description of Types of Variables

Variables	Type	Description
Social interactions and peer support	Independent	Level of social interactions and peer support among students
Withdrawal/exclusion	Independent	Incidents of student withdrawal or exclusion
Lack of cooperation	Independent	Degree of cooperation among students
Peer pressure	Independent	Influence of peer pressure on students
Academic Performance	Dependent	Overall academic achievement
Grade Point Average (GPA)	Dependent	Student's GPA

3. METHODOLOGY RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research designs to offer a comprehensive analysis of the impact of students' social interactions and peer support on academic performance in secondary schools in Rwanda. The quantitative component focused on measuring the extent and types of disruptive behaviours and their correlation with academic performance. The qualitative approach explored the underlying factors and contextual influences through detailed insights from school leaders and teachers..

3.1 Population, sample and sampling strategies

The study focused on secondary school teachers, students, and school leaders across Rwanda. To ensure broad and representative coverage, a multi-stage sampling approach was used.

In the first stage, schools were categorized by type—boarding and day schools—using stratified sampling. From each province and Kigali City, one school of each type was randomly selected, resulting in a total of 10 secondary schools.

Within each selected school, participants for the quantitative phase were randomly chosen. Specifically, Senior Three (S3) students were selected because their longer exposure to the school environment allows them to better recognize and reflect on disruptive behaviors.

Using Taro Yamane's formula with a 5% margin of error, the required sample size for students was calculated as follows:

$$n= \frac{N}{1+N\times e^2} = \frac{816}{1+816\times 0.05^2} = 268$$

where:
- $N = 816$ (total student population)
- $e = 0.05$ (margin of error)

Similarly, teachers from Senior One (S1), Senior Two

(S2), and Senior Three (S3) classes were selected to gather diverse insights on student behavior. A proportional sampling method was used to ensure balanced representation across different subjects, resulting in a total of 94 teachers for the quantitative phase:

$$n= \frac{N}{1+N\times e^2} = \frac{123}{1+123\times 0.05^2} = 94$$

where:
- $N = 123$ (total teacher population)
- $e = 0.05$ (margin of error)

For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was used. Eight students from each school were chosen to participate in focus group discussions aimed at exploring disruptive behaviors and their effect on academic performance. Similarly, 8 to 10 teachers per school participated in focus groups to share their perspectives and classroom experiences.

Additionally, three key school leaders Head Teacher (HT), Director of Studies (DOS), and Director of Discipline(DDD) were selected from each school for semi-structured interviews. These individuals were chosen due to their administrative roles and their comprehensive understanding of student behavior and academic outcomes. This combination of diverse participants across quantitative and qualitative phases ensured a rich, in-depth understanding of the issues under study across Rwanda's secondary education system.

3.2 Research instruments and data collection procedures

This study employed questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis as data collection tools. Structured questionnaires gathered quantitative data on disruptive behaviours and academic performance from teachers and S3 students. Semi-structured interviews with school administrators provided qualitative insights into behaviour causes, impacts, and management strategies. Focus group discussions with teachers and students enabled deeper exploration of key issues. Documentary analysis involved reviewing school

reports, attendance registers, and other relevant documents to validate and supplement data collected through other instruments, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of student behaviour and academic outcomes.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

For quantitative data collection, questionnaires were distributed in person to students and teachers in their respective schools. To collect qualitative data, face-to-face interviews were conducted, with each participant interviewed individually and the sessions recorded. For focus group discussions, a group of participants was assembled, and the researcher played the role of facilitator. Both interviews and focus group discussions were scheduled at convenient times for participants to minimise disruption to the teaching and learning timetable. All sessions were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim for later analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data collected from students, teachers, and administrators was analysed using inferential statistics

and thematic analysis.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were prioritised in this study to protect participants' rights and well-being. Informed consent was obtained after explaining the study's purpose, risks, and benefits. Confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were ensured. Support measures were in place, and student anonymity during focus groups encouraged honest discussion without fear of retaliation or discomfort.

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

This section presents the findings. It includes the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire, as well as the qualitative data gathered through classroom observations and interviews.

i)   Identification of respondents

The respondents in this study are categorised by their role (teachers and students), the type of school they attend (boarding or day school), and their sex, as illustrated in figures 1 and 2.

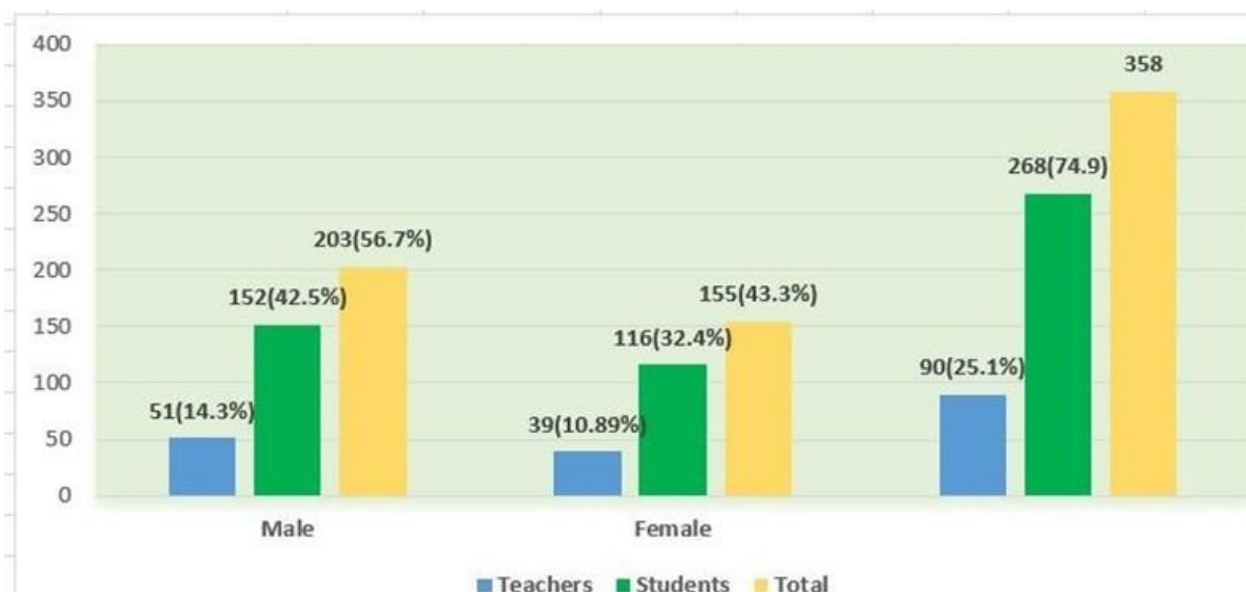**Sex and category of respondents:**

Figure 1: Respondents according to sex and category.

As shown in Figure 1, the study involved 358 participants constituting both male and female teachers and students drawn from both boarding and day schools. Proportionally, male participants 203(56.7%) were slightly more than the females; 155(43.3%). By category, student

respondents; 268(74.9%) out numbered teacher respondents; 90(25.1%).
In terms of sex, male respondents were slightly over a half; 56.7% (203) while females were equally below a half; 155 (43.3%). The gender proportions indicates that

gender consideration was ensured.
In terms of sex, male respondents were slightly over a half; 56.7% (203) while females were equally below a half; 155 (43.3%).
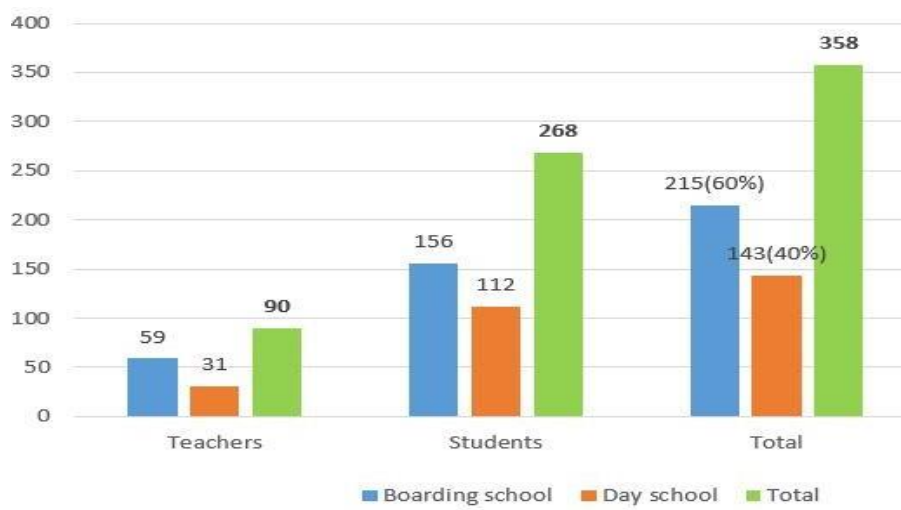
Respondents were drawn from both boarding and day schools as presented in figure 2.

Figure 2: **Respondents according to type of school**

Data presented in figure 2 indicates that respondents (teachers and students) were drawn from both boarding schools (60%) and day schools (40%). From public schools data was obtained from 59 teachers and 156 students while from day schools 31 teachers and 112 students responded. Overall, a larger proportion of the sample is was taken from boarding schools. This provided an opportunity to get more responses from students who spend more time in school premises.

i) **Presentation of Results for objective one: Factors Influencing Students' Interpersonal Relationships, Social Interactions, and Disruptive Behavior**
• **Presentation of results from teachers**

Table 1: The impact of negative Social Interactions and lack of peer support

Interpersonal behaviours/ Negative social interactions/insufficient peer support	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD	MAX	MIN
Students face challenges in receiving help or support from peers	6	34	41	6	3	2.6	17.3	41	3
Students experience difficulties in building positive relationships with classmates	7	36	37	9	1	2.6	16.6	37	1
Students have trouble in collaborating with classmates	8	39	33	5	5	2.6	16.1	39	5
Students feel that their contributions are not valued by peers	5	47	26	11	1	2.5	18.0	47	1
Students experience social exclusion in class activities	15	31	34	7	2	2.4	14.2	34	2

The study reveals significant peer-related challenges among students: 41% lack support from peers, 37% struggle to build positive relationships, and 33% face difficulties in collaboration. Moreover, 47% feel their input is undervalued, and 34% report social exclusion during class. These issues contribute to disengagement, reduced participation, and weakened classroom cohesion, ultimately impacting students' academic performance.

Table 2: Withdrawal and Exclusion in Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal behaviours/Withdrawal/Exclusion	1	2	3	4	5	Mea n	SD	MA X	M IN
Students withdraw from social interactions with peers.	16	36	31	5	1	2.3	15.2	36	1
Students miss out on collaborative opportunities due to withdrawal	11	48	23	8		2.3	18.2	48	8
Students isolate themselves during school events.	14	40	29	5	1	2.3	16.0	40	1
Students avoid participating in group activities.	18	40	26	5		2.2	15.5	40	5
Students feel excluded from peer groups or social circles	22	40	21	6		2.1	15.0	40	6

The results indicate that 31% of students experience social withdrawal, reflected by a mean score of 2.3, suggesting feelings of disconnection or isolation. Additionally, 48% avoid collaborative opportunities, likely due to social anxiety or lack of confidence. Similarly, 40% of students isolate themselves during school events, limiting their sense of belonging, and avoid group activities. Moreover, 40% feel excluded from peer groups, highlighting a significant sense of marginalization. These findings suggest that social withdrawal negatively affects students' engagement in both academic and social settings.

Table 3: The Influence of Peer Pressure on Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal behaviours/Peer pressure	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD	MAX	MIN
Students make decisions based on peer influence rather than personal preference	3	22	51	11	2	2.9	19.1	51	2
Students face challenges in resisting peer pressure	2	35	42	9	2	2.7	18.2	42	2
Students feel obligated to act a certain way to fit in with their peers	4	37	38	8	3	2.7	17.2	38	3
Students change their behavior to align with peer group norms	9	33	34	11	3	2.6	14.4	34	3
Students feel compelled to participate in risky behaviors due to peer influence	10	46	27	6	1	2.4	17.7	46	1

Students feel a moderate sense of responsibility to align with peer expectations (Mean = 2.7), although the intensity of this feeling varies across individuals. They report minimal changes in behavior to conform to peer group norms (Mean = 2.6), with significant variation in conformity levels. The tendency to engage in risky behaviors due to peer influence is low (Mean = 2.4), but there is noticeable variation in how students experience this pressure. Overall, students face moderate peer influence, with differing degrees of pressure to adjust their behaviors and make risky decisions.

3.1.2: Presentation of results from students

Table 4: Varying Frequency of Student Exclusion from Social A School

	Frequency	**%**
Sometimes	144	54%
Often	44	16%
Always	2	1%
Rarely	27	10%
Never	51	19%

The survey indicates that a significant number of students experience social exclusion, with 70% feeling left out either occasionally or frequently. While 54% of students report feeling excluded "sometimes," pointing to occasional social difficulties, 16% experience exclusion "often," suggesting ongoing challenges in peer relationships. A small percentage (1%) feel excluded "always," which may reflect deeper emotional issues. However, 19% of students report never feeling left out, indicating positive social integration. These findings highlight the need for strategies that promote inclusivity and offer support to those who face frequent exclusion.

Table 5: Impact of feeling excluded from a group or activity on future social participation

	Frequency	**%**
I avoid social events altogether	120	45.3%
I am less willing to participate in future events	70	26.4%
I am more eager to participate in future events	50	18.9%
It has no effect on my willingness	25	9.4%

The findings reveal that 71.7% of students withdraw socially after exclusion, avoiding future interactions. Meanwhile, 18.9% are motivated to engage more to prove themselves, and 9.4% remain unaffected, showing
.
resilience. These results highlight the varied emotional responses to exclusion and its significant impact on students' social behavior

Table 6: The impact of comfort in Sharing feelings of exclusion with Friends or Peers

	Frequency	**%**
Some what uncomfortable	154	58%
Very comfortable	45	17%
Neutral	39	15%
Somewhat comfortable	15	6%
Very uncomfortable	14	5%

Table 6 reveals that most individuals feel uneasy discussing exclusion, with 58% feeling somewhat uncomfortable and only 17% very comfortable sharing such emotions. About 15% are neutral, 6% somewhat comfortable, and 5% very uncomfortable. These findings suggest that emotional discomfort, fear of judgment, or stigma often hinder open conversations about exclusion.

Table 7: Frequency of collaborating with classmates on group assignments

	Frequency	**%**
Sometimes	132	**49.25**
Often	60	**23.38**
Rarely	18	**4.89**
Never	55	**20.52**

Table 7 shows that 49.25% of participants occasionally find group assignments challenging, indicating that group work can be difficult for many students at times. Additionally, 23.38% report facing these difficulties more often, suggesting regular struggles with collaboration. A smaller group (4.89%) rarely encounters challenges, while 20.52% never struggle with group tasks, implying ease in collaboration. Overall, the results highlight varying experiences with group work, pointing to the need for strategies to assist students who face challenges, as the majority report difficulties at least occasionally

Table 8: Students' views on the importance of collaboration with classmates in team activities

	Frequency	%
Slightly important	124	46%
Moderately important	52	19%
Not important at all	13	5%
Extremely important	48	18%
Very important	30	11%

Table 8 reveals that 46% of students consider collaboration in team activities to be "Slightly important," suggesting that while it is somewhat valuable, it's not seen as essential. Another 19% view it as "Moderately important," meaning cooperation is appreciated but not a top priority. Eighteen percent regard it as "Extremely important," indicating that teamwork is seen as crucial for success. Only 5% feel it's "Not important at all," and 11% believe it is "Very important." Overall, while most students recognize the value of collaboration, opinions differ on its level of importance.

Table 9: Frequency of feeling influenced by friends to participate in uncomfortable activities

	Frequency	%
Never	12	4%
Rarely	21	8%
Sometimes	173	65%
Often	62	23%

Table 9 shows that peer pressure is common, with 65% of participants sometimes feeling pressured to engage in uncomfortable activities and 23% often experiencing it. Only 8% rarely and 4% never feel such pressure. Overall, most participants frequently encounter peer influence in situations that challenge their comfort or preferences.

ii) Presentation of results from interview and group discussions

Results from HTs, DOS, DOD and teachers'group discussions on the root causes of exclusion, Lack of Cooperation, and Peer Support, and their impact on academic performance. They found that exclusion, lack of cooperation, and inadequate peer support in the school environment are strongly connected to psychosocial issues that have a significant impact on students' academic performance. Their attention was mainly directed towards the following attributions:
☐ Exclusion was often attributed to social isolation, bullying, or a lack of emotional support, which can cause students to feel marginalized and disconnected from their peers. This emotional detachment can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression, all of which hinder students' ability to focus on and engage with their academic work.
☐ The lack of cooperation was recognized as a symptom of interpersonal difficulties, such as poor communication skills, distrust, or unresolved conflicts among peers."Students who experience difficulties in building positive relationships may struggle to work collaboratively, which limits their ability to learn from each other and hinders group-based

academic tasks" stated HT. This lack of collaboration can result in feelings of frustration and inadequacy, further impacting academic performance.
☐ Similarly, the lack of peer support was seen as a key factor contributing to disengagement and poor academic outcomes. Students who lack supportive friendships or emotional connections within the school environment may struggle to navigate academic challenges. Without the encouragement and motivation that peer relationships provide, students are more likely to experience feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and disinterest in their studies. These psychosocial factors create an environment where students' emotional well-being is compromised, which in turn affects their ability to engage, participate, and perform academically.

Addressing these issues requires fostering a more inclusive and supportive school culture that encourages positive peer interactions and emotional growth.

iii)   Presentation of results for objective 2: Assessing the impact of negative peer dynamics on students' academic performance

Assessing the impact of feelings like exclusion, lack of cooperation, and peer support can be complex and may require advanced methods. Given their interconnected nature, it is essential to examine their collective influence on student performance. The findings, based on the accumulated academic performance for the S1 and S2 academic year, are presented in the table below.

Table 10: The Relationship Between social interaction ,peer support and Academic Performance

%	Letter grade	Descriptor	Performance		%
			Students	with disruptive behaviour/number	
80-100	A	Excellence	0		0
75-79	B	Very good	0		0
70-74	C	Good	0		0
65-69	D	Satisfactory	2		0.8
60-64	E	Adequate	7		2.6
50-59	S	Minimum Pass	169		63
0-49	F	Fail	90		33.6
Total			**100**		**268**

The results demonstrate a clear link between disruptive behavior and academic performance. No students achieved scores in the "Excellence" (A), "Very Good" (B), or "Good" (C) categories, indicating that disruptive behavior negatively affects academic success. Only 0.8% exhibited minimal disruption, and just 2.6%

showed adequate behavior. Despite disruptions, 63% met the minimum passing standards, while 33.6% failed, underscoring the significant impact of disruptive behavior. These findings highlight the importance of focused interventions to manage disruptive behavior and enhance student performance.

Table 11: : Gender-based Analysis of Student Performance

National Education Standards Authority(NESA)	Studen ts/Fem ale	%	Studen ts /Male	%	Total numb er	%	Min	Mo de	DV
Excellence A(80 -100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Very Good B(75-79)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Good C(70 -74)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Satisfactory D(65-69)	0	0	2	1.32	2	0.75	0	2	0
Adequate E(60 64)	5	4.31	2	1.32	7	2.61	2	5	1.5
Minimum Pass E(50-59)	110	94.83	59	38.82	169	63.06	59	110	25.5
Fail F (0 -49)	1	0.86	89	58.55	90	33.58	1	89	44
Total			**152**		**268**	**100**			

Table 11 highlights notable gender disparities in academic performance. Neither male nor female students achieved top scores (80+), but a higher percentage of females reached the "Adequate" range (60-64%) compared to males (4.31% vs. 1.32%). Females also had a higher passing rate, with 94.83% meeting the minimum

standard, while only 38.82% of males did. There was a significant gender gap in failure rates, with just 0.86% of females failing compared to 58.55% of males, emphasizing the greater academic difficulties faced by male students and the need for focused support.

Table 12: Analysis of Student Performance by School Type

National Education Standards Authority(NESA)	Students/ Boarding	%	Students /Day	%	Total numbe r	%	Min	M od e	DV
Excellence A(80 - 100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Very Good B(75-79)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Good C(70 -74)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Satisfactory D(65-69)	2	1.80	0	0	2	0.75	0	2	0
Adequate E(60 64)	5	4.50	2	1.27	7	2.61	2	5	1.9
Minimum Pass E(50-59)	103	92.79	66	42.04	169	63.06	66	10 3	42.5
Fail F (0 -49)	1	0.90	89	56.69	90	33.58	1	89	43.7
Total	**111**		**157**		**268**	**100**			

Table 12 shows a significant academic gap between boarding and day students. While neither group achieved top scores, 92.79% of boarding students met the minimum pass mark compared to 42.04% of day students. Day students also had a much higher failure rate, highlighting the need for targeted academic support.

ii)   Discussion of the results

These findings are consistent with existing research on peer relationships, social involvement, and academic engagement. The study revealed that a significant number of students (53.7%) frequently feel excluded from social activities at school, with a weighted mean score of 3.1. This aligns with Juvonen et al. (2022), who found that students who face frequent social exclusion are more likely to experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. Their research indicated that exclusion can lead to disengagement from school activities and lower self-esteem, which can negatively impact both academic and social involvement. Additionally, Masten et al. (2023) contend that exclusion from peer groups during adolescence can impede the development of crucial social skills and decrease the likelihood of students participating in class and other school activities. The results of this study reflect a widespread experience among students, underscoring the importance of interventions aimed at promoting inclusivity and peer acceptance.

With a weighted mean of 3.0, the study indicates that nearly half of the students (49.4%) often find it difficult to collaborate with classmates on group assignments. This aligns with Topping et al. (2022), who noted that interpersonal conflicts, mistrust, and unequal workload distribution can impede the success of group tasks in educational environments. The challenges highlighted in this study, including communication barriers and differing viewpoints, are in line with Johnson & Johnson (2023), who emphasized that effective group work depends on clear communication, shared objectives, and mutual respect. Difficulties in group work represent not only interpersonal challenges but academic ones as well, as students who struggle with collaboration may miss out on collaborative learning opportunities, which are known to improve both social and academic outcomes (Slavin, 2023). This study underscores the need for better conflict resolution strategies and structured group work practices.

The study also revealed that a significant number of students (45.3%) avoid social events entirely after being excluded, while 26.4% become less willing to participate in future activities. This highlights the long-lasting emotional effects of exclusion, which are well-documented in the literature. Williams (2022) suggests that students who experience social exclusion often develop a fear of future rejection, leading them to withdraw from social situations to avoid further emotional distress. Similarly, Cohen & Garcia (2023) found that exclusion can decrease students' motivation to engage in future social or academic activities. This "cycle of rejection" leads to further disengagement and isolation. To break this cycle, it is crucial for schools to create inclusive environments that encourage participation and provide opportunities for students to rebuild their social confidence.

The finding that 58% of students feel "somewhat uncomfortable" discussing exclusion with friends or peers highlights the stigma surrounding emotional vulnerability. This is consistent with Thompson et al. (2021), who found that students are often reluctant to share feelings of social exclusion due to fears of being further ostracized or misunderstood. Rosenblum et al. (2024) also noted that many students avoid discussing exclusion because they fear that showing vulnerability could lead to more rejection or embarrassment. This emphasizes the need for schools to foster a culture of open communication and support, where students feel safe to express their emotional challenges. Teachers and counselors play a vital role in creating these safe spaces and helping students process

their emotions constructively.

Research by Smith et al. (2023) and Jones & Roberts (2022) support the findings in Table 12, highlighting the performance gap between boarding and day students. They suggest that boarding students benefit from structured environments, greater academic resources, and closer teacher support, which contribute to better performance. In contrast, day students face challengesbalancing academics with home life, leading to lower success rates. Williams (2021) emphasizes the need for targeted academic support to help underperforming groups, particularly day students, reach their full potential.

Recent research, including studies by Smith & Lee (2022) and Davis et al. (2023), supports the gender disparities in academic performance highlighted in Table 11. Their findings show that female students generally outperform males, particularly in terms of passing rates and failure rates. Smith & Lee (2022) found that girls tend to be more academically engaged, contributing to better results. Davis et al. (2023) stress the need for specialized support for male students to address their academic challenges and reduce the performance gap.

Overall, the findings highlight significant patterns in student performance, particularly regarding disruptive behaviors, gender, and school type. Disruptive behaviors, such as peer pressure and exclusion, were shown to negatively impact academic success, with excluded students less likely to engage in future activities. This underscores the need to foster inclusivity and address disruptive behaviors to improve academic outcomes. Additionally, female students outperformed male students, with higher passing rates and fewer failures, suggesting a need for targeted academic support for males. Boarding students also performed better than day students, indicating that structured environments and teacher support contribute to higher academic achievement.

III) CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of disruptive behaviors on academic performance in Rwandan secondary schools, focusing on the influence of social interactions, exclusion, and peer pressure. The research aimed to identify common disruptive behaviors, assess their effects on academic achievement, and suggest strategies for improvement. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study gathered data from 268 students, 94 teachers, and 30 school leaders, incorporating both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys.

The findings revealed a significant correlation between disruptive behaviors linked to exclusion and peer pressure and lower academic performance. Students who experienced social exclusion or succumbed to peer pressure were more likely to struggle academically,

exhibiting poor performance in both assessments and group activities. Over 63% of students displayed behaviorsthat negatively impacted their academic outcomes, with 33.6% failing to meet the minimum academic standards. In contrast, few students demonstrated the positive classroom behavior typically associated with high academic achievement.

These results underline the critical role of social interactions, particularly the negative effects of exclusion and peer pressure, in shaping students' academic experiences. The study highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions, including structured behavioral management strategies, teacher training, and student counseling, to address disruptive behaviors. Creating a supportive and inclusive school environment, where students feel connected and supported by their peers, is crucial for improving both social dynamics and academic success.

Recommendations

The successful management of disruptive behavior in educational settings is crucial for fostering a positive learning environment that encourages student engagement and academic achievement. This report presents recommendations based on input from school leadership, teachers, and students concerning the recruitment of career guidance counselors and career development professionals, as well as the significance of ongoing professional development (CPD) in Emotional Intelligence (EI). These suggestions aim to tackle disruptive behavior while simultaneously improving academic performance by offering vital emotional and career support for both students and teachers.

i) Recruitment of Career Guidance Counselors

A key concern highlighted by school leadership is the necessity for career guidance counselors and career development professionals in secondary schools. As students experience increasing pressure regarding their future career choices, it can lead to anxiety and disruptive behaviors. Career guidance counselors can offer tailored support, assisting students in setting clear academic and career goals. By helping students develop relevant career skills, these counselors can better prepare them for life after school, thereby alleviating uncertainty and anxiety that often contribute to disruptive behaviors. When students have a clear vision of their future paths, they are more likely to stay engaged and focused on their academic responsibilities. ii)Professional Development Training in Emotional Intelligence for Teachers

Emotional Intelligence (EI) plays a vital role in managing disruptive behavior in the classroom. Teachers who possess strong EI are better equipped to manage challenging situations calmly, defuse tension, and maintain a positive learning atmosphere. These CPD programs will focus on enhancing teachers' emotional

intelligence, covering the following areas:

☐　　Self-Awareness: Educators should be trained to identify their own emotions and understand how these emotions influence their teaching.

☐　　Emotional Regulation: Teachers should acquire strategies to manage common classroom emotions such as frustration and stress.

☐　　Empathy and Active Listening: Training should focus on developing empathy, enabling teachers to better understand students' emotional needs.

☐　　Conflict Resolution: Teachers should be provided with techniques to resolve conflicts and address disruptive behavior effectively.

☐　　Mindfulness and Stress Reduction: Incorporating mindfulness practices will help both teachers and students manage stress and maintain focus.

iii)　　Ministry of Education (MINEDUC)

We recommend that the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) take proactive measures to incorporate emotional intelligence training into teacher education programs.This would ensure that educators are well-equipped with the necessary skills to manage their emotions and support the emotional development of their students, ultimately contributing to a more effective and compassionate educational system

These recommendations, derived from feedback from school leadership and teaching staff, aim to improve student engagement, behavior, and academic achievement by enhancing emotional support and career guidance in schools.

iv)　　School leaderships

The study recommends that school leadership organize three workshops per year for parents and school staff. These workshops should focus on the importance of career guidance, emotional intelligence (EI), and fostering inclusive environments. By actively involving parents, teachers, and students in these discussions, we can build stronger support systems at both home and school, reduce peer pressure, and ultimately improve academic performance.

Declaration of conflicting interest

　　The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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