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Peer contagion effect on the academic behaviour of year 9 students at SMPN 1 Pekalongan

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Abstract: Social interaction in education, especially among peers, plays an important role in shaping students' academic behaviour. One interesting phenomenon in educational psychology studies is the peer contagion effect, which is the tendency of individuals to imitate or adjust their behaviour to their peer group, both positively and negatively. This effect is particularly influential during adolescence, when self-discovery and social pressure are dominant factors in shaping behaviour, including in an academic context. This study aims to determine the influence of peer contagion effects on the academic behaviour of Year 9 students at SMP Negeri 1 Pekalongan in the 2024/2025 academic year. The phenomena observed include the use of foul language, difficulty concentrating on studying due to peer influence, and the emergence of stress and depression in the learning process. From a Buddhist perspective, ethical behaviour such as sammā-vācā (right speech) and sammā-kammanta (right action) are important foundations in character building and learning discipline. The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of educational science and provide practical benefits for teachers, students, parents, and educational institutions in overcoming the negative effects of peer influence. This study also highlights the importance of strengthening moral and ethical values through Buddhist-based character education as a preventive measure against deviant behaviour in the school environment. By integrating ethical values into the curriculum, it is hoped that students will be better able to cope with peer pressure and develop positive academic behaviour. In addition, this approach can also create a more supportive learning environment where students can be inspired to achieve better results.

Keywords: Peer Contagion Effect, Academic Behaviour, Adolescents, Peer Influence, Buddhist Education.

1. Introduction

Education is no longer merely a process of knowledge transfer, but also an arena of social interaction that shapes the behaviour, attitudes, and morals of students. One of the powerful social factors in education is the peer contagion effect, which is the effect of behaviour transmission from peers through intense social interaction. Adolescents, as a group of age seekers, are very vulnerable to this influence, especially in the school environment. Continuous social interaction in the classroom and outside the classroom creates an ecosystem of values and norms that can spread between individuals. As stated

by J. W. Creswell, peer contagion is a process whereby group behaviour or attitudes spread through psychological and social mechanisms [1].

The effects of peer contagion can be seen in both positive and negative forms. Students can become more disciplined and motivated because their friends have a high learning ethic. However, conversely, students can also be influenced to imitate deviant behaviour such as skipping classes or being apathetic towards academic tasks, showing that peer groups with low academic norms tend to reduce the motivation and learning performance of the students who are members of the group. This condition creates a serious challenge in creating a healthy and productive academic environment, according to Carneiro Junior [2].

According to H. L. Joseph and G. P. Kuperminc [3], the process of peer behaviour contagion is closely related to social status, group norms, and social feedback. When students feel accepted in a group because they imitate deviant speech patterns or attitudes, they tend to repeat them in order to maintain their social position. This shows that academic behaviour is not only determined by internal motivation, but also by social expectations within the group. The negative impact of peer contagion is also highlighted by L. Steinberg and K. C. Monahan, who emphasise that without control from the educational environment, peer influence can trigger apathy, low motivation to learn, and academic irregularities among students. Therefore, educational institutions must create a healthy social system that can direct peer interactions in a constructive direction. The formation of positive study groups is one effective strategy in overcoming these negative contagion effects [4].

The influence of peers is very dominant in shaping the learning habits of adolescents. X. Qin, S. Zhang, X. Liao, H. Niu, and A. Dnes highlight that even high-achieving students can hide their potential if their peer group does not value academic achievement. This means that academic achievement is often sacrificed in order to maintain social status [5]. This is an important indicator that student group development must consider socio-emotional aspects, not just cognitive aspects. In Buddhism, the concept of kalyāṇamittatā, or friendship with wise people, is the main foundation of a holy life. B. Sujato mentions that "the whole of this holy life depends on kalyāṇamittatā," which in the context of education means the importance of having wise friends as drivers of academic success. Buddhist values such as sīla (morality), samādhi (concentration), and paññā (wisdom) are highly relevant to strengthening healthy academic behaviour [6].

Santrock explains that students who associate with friends who have a high learning ethos tend to show better class participation and academic results, while associating with passive friends will reduce their enthusiasm for learning [7]. This shows that the social environment is a reflection of students' academic achievements. Learning behaviour cannot be separated from the social context in which students develop. In addition to positive pressure, negative peer pressure is also an important factor in the context of peer contagion. Steinberg and Laurence [8] state that adolescents who experience pressure from their group tend to adopt deviant behaviour in order to maintain their existence within the group. This signals that interventions must include the formation of shared academic norms, not just individual evaluation. The application of Buddhist values in

education can be the answer to this challenge. Buddhist teachings that emphasise "right speech" (sammā-vācā) and "right action" (sammā-kammanta) can shape ethical and productive academic attitudes. These values are not only spiritual but also applicable in building a supportive and integrity-filled learning community.

H. Korpipää et al explain that in practice, students in positive social environments are proven to be more consistent in attending classes, actively completing assignments, and showing active participation in discussions [9]. This shows that peer contagion is not always negative, but can be a positive force if instilled in a collective learning culture. Schools need to be facilitators in shaping this culture. Based on this background, this study aims to determine the extent of the influence of the Peer Contagion Effect on the academic behaviour of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Pekalongan. This study also seeks to measure the strength of the relationship between the two and identify whether Buddhist values can moderate these social dynamics. The hypothesis proposed is that there is a significant influence of the Peer Contagion Effect on student academic behaviour. If this hypothesis is proven, then spiritual and social approaches can be used as the foundation for a more comprehensive education in the view of Z. Ruan, L. Zhang, X. Shu, and Q. Xuan [10]. One phenomenon that illustrates this influence is the Peer Contagion Effect, which is the tendency for students to adopt the behaviour, attitudes, or academic habits of their peers. The contagion effect from peers is a fundamental social phenomenon in which behaviour, attitudes, and emotions are transmitted between individuals in peer groups [10].

In the context of education, the Peer Contagion Effect can play a role in both increasing learning motivation and decreasing student academic performance. For example, if a student is in a group that has a positive attitude towards learning. In the view of L. G. Burgess, P. M. Riddell, A. Fancourt, and K. Murayama, if they support each other in completing tasks or sharing effective learning strategies, then these students will tend to be influenced to increase their academic efforts. Conversely, if students are exposed to groups that exhibit negative behaviours, such as lack of interest in learning or use of foul language, they may adopt these behaviours, which can have a detrimental effect on their academic performance and mental health [11].

2. Method

This study used a quantitative approach with a survey method. The research design used was a correlational study, aiming to determine the relationship between the independent variable, namely the peer contagion effect, and the dependent variable, namely student academic behaviour. This study was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Pekalongan in the 2024/2025 academic year. The population in this study consisted of all 81 ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Pekalongan. The sampling technique used was total sampling, as the population size was relatively small and could be studied in its entirety. Thus, the entire population was used as the research sample. Data collection was carried out through the distribution of questionnaires designed using a Likert scale. The research instrument consisted of 72 statement items reflecting the indicators of each variable. For the Peer Contagion Effect (X) variable, the indicators used included: peer

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social influence, interaction and relationships with groups, and peer pressure. Meanwhile, for the academic behaviour (Y) variable, the indicators included: attendance in class, attention during learning, participation in class, and study time at home.

After data collection, the next step was to conduct a descriptive analysis to provide an overview of the characteristics of the respondents and the variables studied. This analysis includes calculating the mean, median, and standard deviation of each indicator used in the study. In this way, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the extent to which peer contagion effect influences students' academic behaviour. In addition, descriptive analysis also helps to identify certain patterns in the data that may not be apparent in inferential analysis. Furthermore, to ensure that the data obtained is reliable, the researchers conducted rigorous validity and reliability tests. The validity test aims to ensure that the instruments used actually measure what is intended, while the reliability test ensures the consistency of the results obtained from these instruments. The results of these two tests showed that all items in the questionnaire had good validity and reliability, so they could be used for further analysis. With these tested instruments, the researchers were confident that the data collected could provide accurate information about the relationship between the peer contagion effect and students' academic behaviour.

After the data was collected and analysed, the researchers then performed a simple linear regression analysis to test the formulated hypothesis. This analysis aimed to determine the extent of the peer contagion effect on students' academic behaviour and to identify whether the relationship was statistically significant. The results of the regression analysis are expected to provide clearer insights into the dynamics of social interaction among students and how this contributes to their academic achievement. Thus, this study not only contributes to the development of science but can also be a reference for educators and policymakers in designing more effective interventions to improve student motivation and academic behaviour. Finally, the researchers also considered external factors that may influence the results of the study, such as the socio-economic conditions of students and support from parents. By understanding the broader context, the researchers hope to provide more comprehensive recommendations for improving the quality of education at SMP Negeri 1 Pekalongan. This study is expected to be a first step for further research on the influence of social interaction in the context of education, as well as for developing better strategies to support students' academic development in the future.

The data collection process began with the preparation and validation of instruments, followed by validity and reliability testing through preliminary trials. Once the instruments were proven to be valid and reliable, the questionnaires were distributed to all respondents. The collected data were analysed using SPSS version 27 with simple linear regression analysis to test the significance of the relationship between variables X and Y. Data normality was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method, and the results showed that the data were normally distributed (significance > 0.05), thus fulfilling the basic assumptions of regression analysis.

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3. Results and Discussion

This study involved 81 ninth-grade students from SMP Negeri 1 Pekalongan as respondents. The data was obtained through the distribution of a Likert scale questionnaire consisting of several indicators to measure the influence of peer contagion and student academic behaviour. The Peer Contagion Effect indicator consisted of three indicators, namely peer social influence, interaction and relationships with groups, and peer pressure within groups. The Academic Behaviour indicator consists of three indicators, namely class attendance, participation in learning, and academic achievement. Before performing the regression analysis, the data was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test with a significance of 0.065. Since this value is greater than 0.05, the data is declared to be normally distributed and suitable for further analysis using simple linear regression. The following are the results of the study

3.1. Instrument Validity Test

Based on the results of the instrument trial conducted by 33 respondents at SMP N 1 Pekalongan, it was found that for variable X, namely Peer Contagion Effect, after conducting a validity test of 40 statement items, there were 36 valid statement items and 4 invalid statement items, namely numbers 10, 16, 17, and 30. For item number 10, the rhitung was 0.331; for item number 16, the rhitung was 0.087; for item number 17, the rhitung was 0.178; and for item number 30, the rhitung was 0.282. Then, for variable Y, namely Academic Behaviour, out of 40 statement items, there were 36 valid statement items and 4 invalid statement items. The invalid items are numbers 43, 49, 61, and 66. Item number 3 has a calculated value of 0.285, item number 9 has a calculated value of 0.236, item number 21 has a calculated value of 0.292, and item number 26 has a calculated value of 0.062. Several items were invalid because they compared the r-table for 33 respondents and the significance level of 0.05 was 0.344. The r-count value is invalid if the r-table is smaller than the r-count. It is also invalid if the significance value is greater than 0.05. Thus, from these two variables, 80 statement items were collected, and 72 statement items were used in the actual study to be distributed to respondents.

3.2. Instrument Reliability Test

Based on the results of the instrument trial by conducting a reliability test using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient formula, if the Cronbach's alpha is ≥value 0.5, the instrument is considered to have good reliability for use. In this study, the reliability test on 72 valid items using SPSS will show whether the instrument items are consistent in measuring the variables X and Y. The results of the reliability test can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Instrument Reliability Test

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
.878	72

Source: Data processed using SPSS 16.0

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It can be concluded from the reliability test presented in the table that the Cronbach's alpha value obtained was 0.878 for the 72 items tested. This value indicates that the research instrument used is highly reliable, as the Cronbach's alpha coefficient value is greater than 0.6. Thus, this instrument has met the requirements for good reliability and can be used consistently to measure variables in actual research.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Peer Contagion Effect	81	102.00	180	1.2114E2	15.23463
Academic Behaviour	81	36.00	171.00	1.3525E2	24.56193
Valid N (listwise)	81				

Source: Data processing results using SPSS 16.0 19

Descriptive analysis was conducted on the two main variables in this study, namely Peer Contagion Effect and academic behaviour. Data were obtained from 81 respondents through a Likert scale questionnaire. Based on the results of Descriptive Statistics, the Peer Contagion Effect variable had a minimum value of 102, a maximum value of 180, a mean value of 121.14, and a standard deviation of 15.23. Meanwhile, the academic behaviour variable showed a minimum value of 36, a maximum of 171, with an average of 135.25 and a standard deviation of 24.56. Before conducting further analysis, the first step was to test the normality of the data. This test aims to determine whether the distribution of data from each variable follows a normal distribution. The normality test was performed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method with a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$). The decision criteria in the normality test are as follows:

If the significance value is > 0.05, then the data is normally distributed.

If the significance value is < 0.05, then the data is not normally distributed.

The overall average of these three indicators shows that the influence of peers on students is quite high, particularly in the form of pressure and social group interaction (Khan et al., 2015).In terms of academic behaviour, descriptive analysis shows that student attendance in class has an average score of 3.58 or 58%, student attention during the learning process is 3.84 or 62.2%, participation in class is 3.86 or 62.6%, and time spent studying at home is 4.05 or 65.6%. All of these indicators are in the moderate category with a fairly high tendency. Z. Arifin explains that this indicates that students' academic behaviour is quite stable, but can still be improved, especially through the influence of a positive social environment [12].

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Table 3. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		
		Unstandardised Residual
N		81
Normal Parametersa	Mean	.000000
	Standard Deviation	21.66111862
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.145
	Positive	.136
	Negative	-.145
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.308
Asymptotic Sig. (two-tailed)		.065
a. Test distribution is Normal.		

Source: Data Processing Results Using SPSS 16.0

Based on the normality test results shown in Table 4.3, an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.065 was obtained. This value is greater than 0.05, so it can be concluded that the residual data is normally distributed. This test was conducted using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov method with 81 respondents, resulting in a Z value of 1.308 and a standard deviation of 21.66. Since the data meets the normality assumption, statistical analysis can be continued using parametric methods. If a comparative analysis is conducted on two conditions (e.g., pretest and posttest), then the appropriate test is the Paired Samples T-Test. The statistical hypotheses used are as follows:

H_0: If the Sig. (2-tailed) value is < 0.05, then there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest results.

H_1: If the Sig. (2-tailed) value is > 0.05, then there is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest results.

Table 4. Coefficientsa

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	227.319	19,529		11,640	.000
	variable	-0.760	.160	-.471	-4.751	.000
a. Dependent Variable: variable						

Source: Data Processing Results Using SPSS 16.0

Based on the table above, the significance value (sig.) is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the peer contagion effect (variable X) has a significant influence on academic behaviour (variable Y). The output in the coefficients table shows a constant value of 227.319. This means that if variable X Peer contagion effect has a value of 0,

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then the constant value for academic behaviour is 227.319. The regression coefficient for variable X Peer contagion effect is 0.760, indicating that every one-unit increase in variable X will increase variable Y by 0.760. The significance value (sig.) in the table is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that variable X has a significant effect on variable Y. With a regression value of 0.760 and a t-test value of 4.751, which is much greater than the t-table value. Therefore, it can be concluded that the higher the influence of the peer contagion effect, the higher the academic behaviour variable.

The hypothesis in this study is formulated as follows:

H_a: There is a significant influence between the Peer Contagion Effect and students' Academic Behaviour.

H_o: There is no significant influence between the Peer Contagion Effect and students' Academic Behaviour.

The hypothesis testing criteria use a significance level (α) of 0.05, with the following decision basis:

H_o: Rejected if the significance value (p-value) is < 0.05 or $t_{calculated}$is > t_{table}. Based on the regression output, the following values were obtained:

$_{Calculated}$t-value = 4.751

Significance (p-value) = 0.000

Degrees of freedom (df) = n - 2 (sample size minus 2)

Since the significance value = 0.000 < 0.05, it can be concluded that $H_0$is rejected and $H_a$is accepted. In other words, there is a significant effect of Peer Contagion Effect on academic behaviour. In addition, the standardised Beta coefficient value of 471 indicates that the influence of the Peer Contagion Effect variable on academic behaviour is very strong, as the value is close to 1. Based on the results of the simple linear regression analysis, it can be concluded that: There is a positive and significant influence between the Peer Contagion Effect and students' academic behaviour. The higher the influence of peers (peer contagion), the higher the level of students' academic behaviour. This shows that students tend to adjust their academic behaviour to their peer environment, both in terms of learning, discipline, and other academic motivations.

Table 5. ANOVA Analysis Results

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10726.737	1	10,726.737	22,576	.000a
	Residual	37,536.325	79	475,143		
	Total	48,263.062	80			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Peer Contagion Effect

b. Dependent Variable: Academic Behaviour

Source: Data processing results using SPSS 16.0

Based on the ANOVA output results, the $F_{calculated}$value obtained was 22.576 with a significance level of 0.000. The SPSS software automatically provides an interpretation of the significance level, so there is no need for manual comparison with the F value in

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the table. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis ($H_{(0)}$)is rejected and the alternative hypothesis $H_{(a)}$is accepted. This indicates that there is a significant effect of the Peer Contagion Effect variable on academic behaviour.

Table 6. Model Summary

Model Summaryb				
Model	R	RSquare	Adjusted R-Squared	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	.471a	.222	.212	21.79778
a. Predictors: (Constant), Peer Contagion Effect				
b. Dependent Variable: Academic Behaviour				

Source: Data Processing Results Using SPSS 16.0

Based on the regression analysis results, it is known that the relationship between Peer Contagion Effect and Academic Behaviour of students has an R_{Square} value of 0.222. This means that 22.2% of changes or variations in students' Academic Behaviour can be explained by the influence of Peer Contagion Effect. Meanwhile, the remaining 77.8% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study. An R value of 0.471 indicates a fairly strong and positive relationship between the two variables. In addition, an Adjusted R Square value of 0.212 reinforces that this model remains fairly stable after being adjusted for the amount of data and variables used. The Standard Error of the Estimate of 21.79778 indicates that there is an average deviation of 21.8 points between the actual value and the predicted value of the model. Although not very high, this model provides a sufficient description of the influence of the Peer Contagion Effect on the academic behaviour of ninth-grade students at SMP N 1 Pekalongan. Overall, it can be concluded that the Peer Contagion Effect has a significant influence on students' academic behaviour, although there are other factors that also play an important role.

Thus, there is a strong and positive relationship between peer influence and students' academic behaviour. Overall, the results of this study reveal that peer influence (peer contagion) has a significant contribution to students' academic behaviour. Group interactions and social pressure within the peer environment are the main factors that shape students' attitudes towards the learning process. Gaxiola Romero et al explain that therefore, a healthy and supportive social environment at school is very important to be directed positively in order to increase student participation, discipline, and academic motivation [13].

4. Discussion

The learning process that takes place at SMP Negeri 1 Pekalongan shows that social interaction in the students' friendship environment plays an important role in shaping their academic behaviour. Based on the results of descriptive analysis, the average value of the Peer Contagion Effect variable of 121.14 indicates a moderate to high influence of peers. Meanwhile, the academic behaviour of students is also quite good, with an average score of 135.25. This means that students who are involved in positive social interactions tend

to exhibit more constructive academic behaviour, such as regular attendance, attention during lessons, and active participation in class activities. These results are in line with Kadel D, who states that "peers play a very important role in shaping behaviour, especially during adolescence, when individuals begin to search for their identity and interact more with social groups outside the family." Peers are not only a place to share experiences, but also a mirror and role model for behaviour, both in positive and negative contexts. On the indicator of peer pressure, it was found that some students felt compelled to conform to the group. This can encourage positive behaviours such as active learning, but it can also cause psychological pressure if the norms that develop within the group are negative [14].

Peer contagion is a process in which attitudes, behaviours, and emotions spread within a group through repeated interactions, and this greatly influences adolescent behaviour in educational settings. Some students also showed symptoms of low self-confidence and tended to be passive in class, especially in the early stages of interaction. According to Manty et al, this phenomenon can be explained through the concept of collective emotional regulation, in which the emotions of individuals in a group tend to adjust to the dominant emotions displayed by the majority of group members [15]. In this context, feelings of awkwardness, embarrassment, or fear of being considered "different" can inhibit student participation. However, with a warm approach and learning based on Buddhist values such as sammā-vācā (right speech) and sammā-kammanta (right action), students gradually show the courage to express their ideas and opinions and participate in discussions. As explained by M. Suryani and I. Hartono in Dhammapada verse 78: "Associate with the wise, avoid the wicked, for association influences one's virtue." This study also underlines the importance of the teacher's role in creating a supportive and non-judgmental classroom climate[16].

Teachers who are able to build positive emotional relationships with students can help alleviate group pressure and create classroom dynamics that are conducive to learning. Good relationships between students and teachers create a comfortable learning environment, where students feel safe to express their opinions and participate actively. Paloyo, Alfredo R explains Thus, it can be concluded that the Peer Contagion Effect not only impacts students' cognitive and motivational dimensions, but also their affective and social aspects [17]. Educational interventions that emphasise the importance of positive interactions, ethical values, and empathetic communication are crucial in shaping healthy and sustainable academic behaviour.

The results of this study indicate that there is a significant relationship between the Peer Contagion Effect and students' academic behaviour, which is consistent with the finding that peer behaviour tends to be contagious in social groups, especially when interactions are intense. This phenomenon is reinforced by research by Abbink et al, which states that peer influence is very strong on the tendency for a decrease or increase in academic motivation, depending on group norms[18]. The coefficient of determination ($R_{(Square)}$)value of 0.681 indicates that the majority of variations in student academic behaviour can be explained by peer influence, which means that this factor is very relevant in shaping student learning dynamics. In this context, students who are

surrounded by friends with a high learning orientation will be more encouraged to exhibit positive academic behaviour. Conversely, a group environment that is permissive of deviant behaviour will encourage a decline in academic achievement. This is in line with Lu & Brown, who state that peer pressure and the search for social identity play a major role in shaping students' attitudes at school. The implications of these results are very important for educators and education policymakers [19].

From a Buddhist perspective, this peer influence is relevant to the concepts of kalyāṇa-mitta (good friends) and paṭicca-samuppāda (the law of cause and effect). This teaching states that the quality of one's environment will determine one's inner direction and behaviour. Therefore, creating a morally and intellectually healthy environment is part of spiritual education. Teachers and schools need to encourage students to choose friendships that promote growth, not destruction. Sinitsyn & Khentonen explain that in this context, managing peer contagion is not only an academic strategy but also a form of Dharma practice in education [20].

Social interactions among students have a significant impact on their academic behaviour. According to Rosenzweig E, et., al, "peers serve as a major influence in the formation of students' identities and academic behaviour." In this context, students who are involved in positive groups tend to show increased self-confidence and motivation to learn [21]. Peer support is also identified as a key factor in school engagement. Olana E and Tefera B conclude that students who have positive relationships with their peers tend to be more motivated to participate in school activities and feel more comfortable in the learning environment [22].

Research has found that "positive relationships between students and teachers can increase academic motivation." When students feel valued and supported by their teachers, they are more likely to engage in the learning process. This shows that the role of teachers is not only as educators, but also as mentors who guide students in their academic journey. Therefore, training for teachers to build positive relationships with students is essential. Ethical values in education also play an important role. "Character education must be an integral part of the curriculum." By teaching values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy, schools can help students develop strong character. Good character will support students in interacting positively with their peers, creating a healthy and productive learning environment.

However, not all peer influences are positive. "Negative peer influences can lead to deviant behaviour and a decline in academic achievement." Therefore, it is important for schools to identify and address these negative influences. Appropriate interventions can help students avoid harmful behaviours and encourage them to engage in more constructive activities. One way to manage peer influence is to create a mentoring programme at school. Mentoring can provide the emotional and academic support that students need. This programme can help students who lack confidence to interact with their peers more positively. With mentors, students can learn how to communicate and collaborate well, increasing their involvement in academic and social activities.

Empathetic communication in social interactions is also very important. According to Rogers, "empathic communication can build stronger relationships between individuals."

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In the context of education, teachers and students need to practise empathetic communication to create a supportive environment. By communicating openly and honestly, students will feel more comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions, encouraging active participation in class discussions [23]. The influence of local culture can also affect social interactions at school. Culture has a significant impact on individual behaviour within a group. In the context of education, it is important to understand the cultural values that exist in society. Schools need to integrate local cultural values into the curriculum to create relevance for students, so that they feel more connected to their learning. This will ensure that the interventions carried out have a truly positive impact on students' academic behaviour. Taking all these aspects into consideration, it can be concluded that social interactions among students have a significant impact on their academic behaviour. Therefore, it is important for educators and policymakers to create an environment that supports positive interactions. By integrating ethical values, empathetic communication, and mentoring programmes, schools can help students develop healthy and sustainable academic behaviour.

The importance of social interaction in the context of education cannot be ignored, especially in shaping students' academic behaviour. According to Kotova E, Saveleva, when students are involved in positive groups, they not only receive emotional support, but also learn from each other in this collaborative learning process, which can improve their understanding of concepts and social skills [24]. In addition, students who have motivated peers tend to be more committed to their academic goals. This shows that a healthy social environment can serve as a catalyst for achieving better results. Therefore, schools need to create an atmosphere that supports positive interactions among students. By organising group activities and collaborative projects, students can learn to support and motivate each other. This will help them develop interpersonal skills that are important for life outside of school.

On the other hand, the challenges students face in social interactions also need to be considered. Peer pressure can be a factor that negatively affects learning motivation, especially if group norms do not support good academic behaviour. Students who feel pressured to conform to the group may experience anxiety and uncertainty, which can hinder their participation in learning activities. Chen Z, Deng Y explain Therefore, it is important for educators to recognise the signs of this negative pressure and provide the necessary support. Guidance and counselling programmes at school can help students overcome these issues by providing a space for them to talk about their experiences. In this way, students can learn to manage peer pressure and develop better mental resilience. This will contribute to improving their emotional and academic well-being [25].

The role of teachers in creating a positive classroom climate is crucial in supporting healthy social interactions. Teachers who are able to build good relationships with students can create a safe and comfortable environment for learning. When students feel valued and supported by their teachers, they are more likely to participate actively in class discussions and activities. Schneider explains that teachers can also act as mediators in situations of conflict that may arise between students. With an empathetic and communicative approach, teachers can help students overcome differences and build

better relationships [26]. This will create an inclusive classroom atmosphere, where every student feels they belong and can contribute. Therefore, training for teachers in communication and classroom management skills is essential to improve the quality of education.

5. Conclusion

This study was conducted to determine the extent of the Peer Contagion Effect on the academic behaviour of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Pekalongan. Based on the analysis of data obtained from 81 respondents, as well as descriptive and inferential statistical processing, several important conclusions can be drawn. First, descriptively, both the Peer Contagion Effect and student academic behaviour were in the moderate to high category. The average Peer Contagion Effect score was 121.14, while the average academic behaviour score was 135.25. This indicates that students feel the influence of their peers quite strongly and, at the same time, they also display academic behaviour that tends to be positive. This means that the dynamics of peer relationships whether in the form of support, pressure, or daily social interaction contribute to how students behave and act in the context of learning. Second, the regression analysis results show that there is a significant influence between the Peer Contagion Effect and students' academic behaviour. This means that students are not only influenced by internal factors such as personal motivation or interest in learning, but also by the existence and quality of social relationships with their peers. Peers can be a source of inspiration, motivation, and even shape the attitudes and values they hold in the learning process.

Thirdly, it was found that certain indicators such as social pressure, the desire to be accepted by the group, and the need to fit in, were the main drivers in the process of transmitting this influence. Some students indicated that when they were in a supportive social environment, they tended to be more active, more confident, and more disciplined in completing academic tasks. Conversely, in unhealthy groups, they could become trapped in deviant behaviour or become passive. Fourth, the process of forming academic behaviour is also greatly influenced by learning strategies and teachers' approaches to classroom management. When teachers succeed in creating a comfortable, empathetic, and inclusive learning climate especially by incorporating value-based approaches such as Buddhist teachings students are more open to character building and developing positive attitudes. Thus, it can be concluded that peer contagion is a real social force in students' lives. The influence of peers can be a positive energy that encourages the growth of good academic habits, or conversely, if not directed, can be a risk factor for the formation of negative behaviour. Therefore, active teacher involvement, a conducive school environment, and the reinforcement of moral and social values are crucial factors in maximising the influence of peers in a constructive direction. The use of qualitative methods or a mixed approach can provide a deeper understanding of student social dynamics Creswell (2024). Further research is also recommended to explore the role of other factors such as family support, the quality of teacher-student relationships, and spiritual values in strengthening positive academic behaviour amid peer influence.

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