

## **The Influence of Peer Environment on Students' Interest in Pursuing Higher Education among 12th-Grade Students of the Accounting and Financial Institution Department at SMK Negeri 25 Jakarta**

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### **Abstract**

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of peer environment on students' interest in pursuing higher education among 12th-grade students majoring in Accounting and Financial Institution at SMK Negeri 25 Jakarta. This quantitative associative study was conducted at SMK Negeri 25 Jakarta. The population and sample of the research consisted of 72 students from the 12th-grade Accounting and Financial Institution department. The data analysis revealed a strong correlation coefficient of 0.8061 and a coefficient of determination of 64.98%, indicating the peer environment's contribution to students' interest in higher education. Hypothesis testing using t-tests showed t-calculated (11.3975) > t-table (1.9944), confirming a significant influence of the peer environment on students' interest in pursuing higher education.

**Keywords:** peer environment; interest; higher education

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is a fundamental human need that plays a crucial role in liberating individuals from ignorance, poverty, and backwardness while fostering human resource development for national progress. Through education, individuals are expected to become productive and knowledgeable contributors to society. Education must be pursued throughout life, as neglecting it can halt or even reverse societal advancement. High-quality education produces superior human resources beneficial for individuals, organizations, and nations, enabling global competitiveness. Therefore, significant attention to education is essential, particularly from the government and relevant stakeholders, as education determines the continuity and advancement of a nation.

The Indonesian National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, Article 3, defines education as a conscious and planned effort to create a learning process that enables students to develop their potential optimally. It aims to cultivate individuals with spiritual strength, self-control, intelligence, noble character, and skills required for society and nation-building. However, the quality of education in Indonesia still requires significant improvement. According to the World Population Review (2021), Indonesia ranked 54th out of 78 countries in educational attainment. Similarly, PISA (2019) ranked Indonesia 72nd out of 77 countries, while the Education Index (2017) placed Indonesia 7th in ASEAN with a score of 0.622. These low indicators reflect weak educational competitiveness.

To improve education quality, the government has divided the system into three categories: formal, informal, and non-formal education. Formal education encompasses elementary to higher education levels. Pursuing higher education offers numerous benefits, such as skill development and creating productive individuals. Vocational programs in high schools are designed to meet the needs of further education or direct employment. In the era of globalization, vocational education must be dynamic and competency-based,

producing graduates with advanced knowledge and skills. Higher education institutions play a vital role in preparing professionals capable of advancing knowledge and technology.

Students' interest in pursuing higher education must be cultivated, as interest reflects an individual's attraction to an activity, driving motivation and action. Various factors influence students' decisions to continue their education, including internal drives and external influences such as parental encouragement and peer environments. Studies reveal that peer environments play a significant role in shaping students' academic aspirations and decisions. Students who have an interest in pursuing higher education are generally more diligent and motivated compared to those who simply follow parental instructions. To understand the interest of vocational high school (SMK) students in continuing their education to higher education, a preliminary study was conducted at SMK Negeri 25 Jakarta through interviews with five students from class XII AKL 1. The results of these interviews served as the basis for further analysis:

**Table 1.** List of Interviewed Students

No	Name	Class	Description
1	Ridam Eka S.	12 AKL	Plans to work due to personal desire and previous experience from Practical Work Training (PKL)
2	Nayla P. S.	12 AKL	Plans to pursue higher education due to personal desire, supported by parents, and influenced by peers
3	Fitri Andini	12 AKL	Plans to pursue higher education due to personal desire, supported by parents, and influenced by peers
4	Rembulan Kinasih	12 AKL	Plans to work after graduation due to personal desire and previous experience from PKL
5	Malik Luther	12 AKL	Plans to work after graduation due to previous experience from PKL

*Source: Interview Results of Class XII AKL by the author (2023)*

Based on the interviews, 3 students (60%) expressed a desire to work immediately after graduation, while 2 students (40%) chose to continue their education to higher education. The higher interest in entering the workforce compared to pursuing further studies is influenced by the preparation provided by practical work training (PKL), which makes students feel readier to enter the workforce rather than continue their education. This indicates that students' priority for pursuing higher education is relatively low.

The low interest in pursuing higher education is caused by various factors, one of which is the influence of the peer environment. Zulfa et al. (2018) stated that peers are one of the factors that influence students' decisions about their future. Kurniawan & Sudrajat (2018) explained that peers are individuals of similar age, status, and mindset, who play an important role in shaping students' interests, activities, and academic achievements (Budisantoso, 2017). This influence is evident in daily life, where students often rely on peers, both positively and negatively. Since students spend most of their time with peers, their influence becomes very dominant, often exceeding that of parents. If a peer group shows more interest in pursuing higher education, students are more likely to follow suit. Conversely, if their peers choose to work, students will be more inclined to enter the workforce. Therefore, the peer environment plays a significant role in shaping students' interest in pursuing higher education.

Based on this explanation, this study is titled “The Influence of Peer Environment on Students' Interest in Pursuing Higher Education among 12th-Grade Students of the Accounting and Financial Institution Department at SMKN 25 Jakarta.”

## METHODS

This research was conducted from April to July 2023 at SMK Negeri 25 Jakarta. A quantitative approach with an associative design was employed. The study population consisted of 535 students, with the sample being 72 students from 12th-grade Accounting and Financial Institution classes (XII AKL 1 and XII AKL 2), selected using purposive sampling.

**Table 2.** Student Population at SMK Negeri 25 Jakarta

No	Class	Number of Students
1	X AKL 1	36
2	X AKL 2	35
3	X MPLB 1	36
4	X MPLB 2	36
5	X BDP	36
6	XI AKL 1	36
7	XI AKL 2	36
8	XI OTKP 1	36
9	XI OTKP 2	36
10	XI BDP	35
11	XII AKL 1	36
12	XII AKL 2	36
13	XII OTKP 1	35
14	XII OTKP 2	36
15	XII BDP	34
Total		535 students

Data were collected through documentation and questionnaires, which underwent validity and reliability tests. Data analysis involved classical assumption tests, simple linear regression analysis, hypothesis testing, and determination coefficient calculations.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### *Results*

#### *Classical Assumption Tests*

##### a. Normality Test:

Using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, the calculated D-value was 0.0609, which was less than the D-table value of 0.1603, indicating normal data distribution.

##### b. Homogeneity Test:

The homogeneity test showed  $F\text{-calculated} (1.1298) < F\text{-table} (1.4815)$ , confirming homogeneous data.

#### *Simple Linear Regression Analysis*

The regression equation was derived as follows:

$$Y = 9,8947 + 0,9108 X$$

Here, Y represents students' interest in higher education, and X represents the peer environment. The constant value of 9.8947 indicates the baseline interest when the peer

environment score is zero. For every one-unit increase in the peer environment score, the interest in pursuing higher education increases by 0.9108 units.

#### *Hypothesis Testing*

Hypothesis testing showed  $t$ -calculated (11.3975) >  $t$ -table (1.9944), leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) and rejection of the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ). This confirms a significant influence of the peer environment on students' interest in higher education.

#### *Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )*

The coefficient of determination was 64.98%, indicating that the peer environment accounts for 64.98% of the variance in students' interest in pursuing higher education. The remaining 35.02% is attributed to other factors not examined in this study.

#### *Discussion*

The study reveals a positive and significant influence of the peer environment on students' interest in pursuing higher education at SMK Negeri 25 Jakarta. These findings align with previous research by Azkiya (2020), which concluded that the peer environment has a positive and significant impact as it provides information and external motivation. The more frequently students interact with their peers, the greater the influence on their learning environment and decision-making processes.

This study is consistent with Darmawan (2017), who found that the peer environment contributes 35% to students' interest in pursuing higher education. Similarly, Budisantoso (2016) stated that the peer environment positively affects students' aspirations to continue their education.

Yulianti (2017) explains that, in the context of higher education, interest is an individual's readiness to invest time, effort, and resources to acquire and integrate information and knowledge through various means. Furthermore, Yulianti (2020) defines the interest in higher education as students' tendencies or desires to continue their education with enthusiasm. This enthusiasm fosters motivation and strengthens students' determination to pursue higher education. Students with such interest actively seek information about academic programs that align with their preferences.

Darmawan (2017) highlights that an individual's interest is influenced by external factors, including the roles of others and the surrounding environment. In this context, the peer environment, both at school and outside of it, plays a critical role in students' development alongside family influence. According to Vhalery (2018), the peer environment involves social relationships or interactions between individuals, groups, or communities of the same age and status. Savira (2021) elaborates that the peer environment includes communication and interactions among individuals with similar maturity levels and age groups.

This study emphasizes that when students' peer groups demonstrate a strong interest in pursuing higher education, other students are likely to follow the same path. Conversely, if their peers prioritize entering the workforce, students tend to adopt similar preferences. Therefore, fostering a positive and supportive peer environment is essential to encourage students to aspire to higher education and achieve their long-term academic goals.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the peer environment significantly influences students' interest in pursuing higher education. The findings demonstrate that students who are surrounded by peers who value and aspire to higher education are more likely to develop similar aspirations. Conversely, students whose peers prioritize entering the workforce tend to follow that path as well.

The study highlights the importance of fostering a supportive peer environment to encourage students to pursue further education. Schools and parents play crucial roles in shaping this environment. For students, selecting peers who motivate and positively influence their academic and personal growth is vital. Engaging in positive extracurricular activities, such as student organizations, scouting, or community service programs, can also help foster these relationships and enhance their potential.

Parents are encouraged to actively provide guidance and motivation for their children, emphasizing the importance of higher education as a valuable investment for their future. Parental support can strengthen students' confidence and determination to pursue their academic goals.

Additionally, schools should take proactive measures to motivate students by organizing activities that promote higher education, such as career counseling, seminars, and partnerships with universities. A supportive academic atmosphere created by schools can help students see higher education as a viable and essential option for their future success.

These recommendations underline the importance of collective efforts from students, parents, and schools in fostering a culture that values education and supports students in achieving their academic aspirations.

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