

Predictive Strength of Peer Pressure on Risk-Taking Behaviour of Pre-Service Teachers: The Mediating Role of Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the predictive strength of peer pressure on the risk-taking behaviour of pre-service teachers in Ghana. A descriptive survey design was used for the study. The target population was pre-service teachers of colleges of education in the northern region of Ghana. The sample size was 350 pre-service teachers randomly selected from level 400 students among the three colleges of education. The instrument used was a 4-point Likert scale with the reliability coefficients of 0.746, 0.789 and 0.858 for decision making, peer pressure and risk-taking behaviour respectively. The Data was analyzed using PLS-SEM to determine the mediating role and relationship among the variables. The study revealed that a significant positive relationship exists between pre-service teachers' peer pressure and their decision-making process. The study on the mediating effect revealed that the decision-making of pre-service teachers moderately mediates the relationship between peer pressure and risk-taking behaviour. It was concluded that, pre-service teachers' peer pressure shapes how people assess various alternatives and arrive at choices within educational and social contexts. The study recommended that colleges of education should provide a supportive peer environment that motivates constructive risk-taking, such as collaborative projects and supervised teaching practicum activities.

Key words: Peer Pressure, Risk-Taking Behaviour, Pre-Service Teachers and Decision-Making

INTRODUCTION

In any human endeavor, people are faced with decisions that can have serious consequences on their health and general well-being. For example, choosing whether or not to speed on a highway, participate in drinking games, or have sex with a stranger can all have a major impact on an individual's life. Understanding how risky decisions are made is of crucial importance.

The significant determinant of decision-making and risk-taking behaviour is peer pressure. Peer pressure involves the influence that peers have on their colleagues' decisions and behaviour, particularly during adolescence and the early stages of adulthood. It remains on record that adolescents are quite susceptible to peer pressure because of their developmental stage, which is characterized by an increased need for

social validation and identity exploration (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Kaleem et al., 2025; Choukas, Bradley & Prinstein, 2014). This influences risk-taking and decision-making behaviours, which have the potential to transform a person's life. A study conducted by Allen and Loeb (2015) indicated that peer pressure often manifests as social comparison, conformity, and adherence to group norms, which lead individuals to alter their views, behaviours, and attitudes to blend in with their peer group (Chakraborty, 2023; Frank, 2021; Laursen & Faur, 2022).

The influence of peer pressure on risk-taking and decision-making behaviours has been confirmed by several empirical studies. Constructive peer pressure can influence socially responsible behaviours such as supporting peers to appreciate a lesson, stick to social standards, choose

decent lifestyle choices, and succeed academically (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Shamsie, 2024). On the contrary, negative peer influence is likely to increase a person's likelihood of engaging in unsafe behaviours, including drug misuse, reckless driving, and antisocial acts when they attempt to fit in with the group or win over their peers (Allen & Loeb, 2015).

The appreciation of the factors that lead to behaviours such as wanting to fit in and being afraid of being left out of social situations is important. Exploring these relationships is essential as peer pressure can result in detrimental consequences, which include participation in hazardous behaviours such as substance abuse or perilous activities. By figuring out why people give in to peer pressure, strategies can be put in place to lessen its bad effects and help young people make better choices.

Notwithstanding the growing body of literature on peer pressure, decision-making, and risk-taking behaviours, most studies on peer pressure, decision-making, and risk-taking have been conducted in Western countries and among secondary school students. Consequently, little is known about these relationships among colleges of education students in Ghana, highlighting the need for context-specific research (Choukas-Bradley & Prinstein, 2014; WHO, 2014).

Research hypotheses

The research hypotheses to be explored in this study include:

1. H_1 : Peer pressure does not influence the decision-making process of pre-service teachers in the colleges of education.
2. H_1 : Peer pressure does not influence risk-taking behaviour of pre-service teachers in the colleges of education.
3. H_1 : There is no relationship between decision-making and risk-taking

behaviour of pre-service teachers in the colleges of education.

4. H_1 : Decision making does not mediate the relationship between peer pressure and risk-taking behaviour of pre-service teachers in the colleges of education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Influence Theory

Herbert Kelman's social influence theory clarifies how people are influenced by their social interactions and group dynamics. Kelman (1958) outlined three main mechanisms of social influence, which include internalization, compliance and identification. It explains the situation in which people do what others are demanding from them to get rewards or avoid punishment; they are complying. The identification components describe the beliefs and behaviours of a group to foster or sustain a sense of belonging and affiliation.

The third aspect is internalization, which represents the final mechanism, occurring when individuals accept and assimilate the values and norms of a group into their belief system (Kelman, 19578). One way that peer pressure affects how decisions are made is through the compliance mechanism. There is a possibility that people give in to peer pressure to fit in or get their peers' approval. For instance, teenagers might do dangerous things like use drugs or break the law because their friends are pressuring them to do so (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). Kelman's theory posits that these individuals may be driven to conform to peer expectations to preserve social acceptance and evade conflict. The theory explains the effects of peer pressure on decision-making and risk-taking behaviours of pre-service teachers. It enables researchers to understand how social influence works in peer groups in relation to how compliance, identification, and internalization work.

MEDIATING ROLE OF DECISION-MAKING

Relationship between Peer Pressure and Risk-Taking Behaviour

Peer pressure is a significant social influence that affects the actions of pre-service teachers, especially in educational settings driven by peers. Nonetheless, its influence on risk-taking behaviour is not invariably direct. Empirical evidence indicates that peer pressure can impact the quality of individuals' judgments by promoting conformity and social acceptance, consequently influencing decision-making processes (Bhujbal & Verma, 2024; Bhattacharyya et al., 2020).

Competence in decision-making is essential in assessing whether peer influence leads to reckless or adaptive risk-taking. Research demonstrates that proficient decision-making correlates with heightened risk awareness and more rational behavioural choices, whereas deficient decision-making escalates susceptibility to irrational or detrimental risk-taking (Hayes, 1999; Pesen & Epçaçan, 2021; Weller et al., 2015). Consequently, decision-making serves as a mediating mechanism by which peer pressure affects risk-taking behaviour among pre-service teachers. Enhancing decision-making abilities may alleviate the adverse impacts of peer pressure while fostering positive risk-taking, crucial for professional development.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

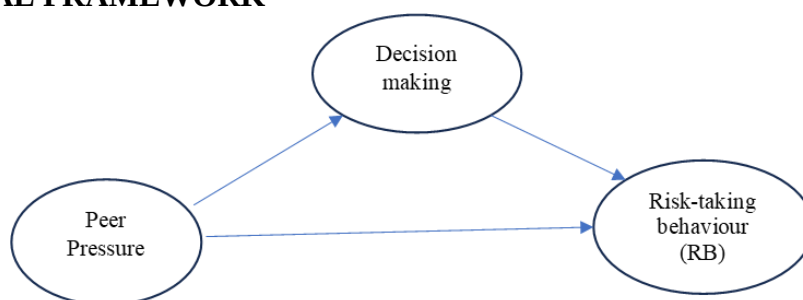


Figure 1: conceptual framework of the deterministic constructs

This framework is grounded in Kelman's Social Influence Theory, which postulates that individuals' behaviours are shaped through social interactions via compliance, identification, and internalization. The framework proposes that peer pressure directly influences pre-service teachers' risk-taking behaviour by encouraging conformity to group expectations. It also suggests that decision-making mediates this relationship, as peer pressure affects how individuals evaluate situations and make behavioural choices. Poor decision-making under peer influence may increase engagement in risky behaviours, whereas effective decision-making promotes rational choices and greater risk awareness (Hayes, 1999; Pesen & Epçaçan, 2021;

Weller et al., 2015). Thus, the framework justifies examining both the direct and indirect effects of peer pressure on risk-taking behaviour among pre-service teachers.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey design was used for the study. A survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population. From sample results, the researcher generalizes or draws inferences to the population (Creswell, 2014). A descriptive survey design was appropriate to investigate the influence among the variables because it helps describe the

prevailing characteristics in the population and also establishes the correlation between variables.

The target population was made up of 1200 level 400 pre-service teachers of colleges of education in the northern region of Ghana. This is because they have been in the college of education system for a long period, and they know the ways and dynamics that exist in the college system, making them appropriate respondents for the study. The sample size was 350 pre-service teachers randomly selected from level 400 students among the three colleges of education in the northern region of Ghana. The sample was determined using Bhardwaj, Agrawal, Vashist and Manna (2024) sample size determination.

The study data were obtained using a self-validated questionnaire. The data was validated using expert judgment and confirmatory factor analysis of the PLS-SEM algorithm. A period of three weeks was used for 350 participants to respond to the items on the questionnaires. The responses to the questionnaires were first edited and coded. The editing procedure was to check whether respondents followed the directions correctly and whether all items were answered. For the analysis of the data, the researchers used Smart PLS to determine the mediation

effect and relationship among the variables.

RESULT

Preliminary analysis

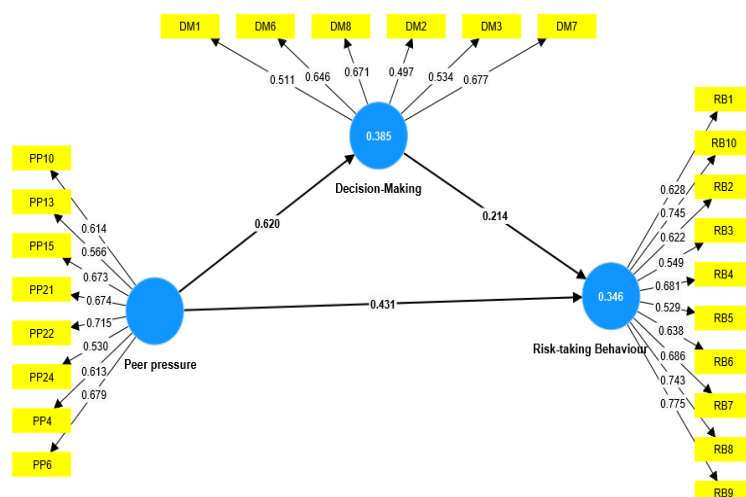
The frequency distribution indicated that 58.9% of the sample populations were females, while 42.1% of the pre-service teachers who participated in the study were males. This implies that most of the pre-service teachers who took part in the study were females. As indicated in the figures and tables of the measurement model (indicator loading, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity), the aspect that was analysed first before the structural model (coefficient discrimination, R^2 ; Significance, p ; predictive relevance, Q^2 ; effect size, F^2). The measurement model, as a preliminary analysis, was done first, which includes the following:

Indicator loadings

To establish the level of acceptability of the indicators on the constructs, the results shown in the figure 1 indicate that loadings met the recommended standard. As depicted in the figure, the indicator loading of peer pressure, risk-taking behaviour and Decision making were within 0.530-0.614, 0.529-0.775 and 0.511-0.677, respectively. Based on the hair et al. (2017), the indicators captured were retained while the rest of the items were deleted

Table 1: Outer Loadings

Items	Decision-Making	Peer pressure	Risk-taking Behaviour
DM1	0.511		
DM2	0.497		
DM3	0.534		
DM6	0.646		
DM7	0.677		
DM8	0.671		
PP10		0.614	
PP13		0.566	
PP15		0.673	
PP21		0.674	
PP22		0.715	
PP24		0.530	
PP4		0.613	
PP6		0.679	
RB1			0.628
RB10			0.745
RB2			0.622
RB3			0.549
RB4			0.681
RB5			0.529
RB6			0.638
RB7			0.686
RB8			0.743
RB9			0.775



Internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity

The analysis of the internal consistency of the constructs was done using CA rho A and CR while the convergent validity was done using AVE. The DV for the study

was assessed using the herotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT). The analysis is captured in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Internal Consistency, Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity

Construct reliability and validity	Cronbach's alpha	rho_a	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Decision-Making	0.746	0.768	0.763	0.534
Peer pressure	0.789	0.800	0.843	0.549
Risk-taking Behaviour	0.858	0.872	0.886	0.541
Discriminant validity- <u>Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) – Matrix</u>				
		Decision-Making	Peer pressure	Risk-taking Behaviour
Decision-Making				
Peer pressure	0.803			
Risk-taking Behaviour	0.586		0.659	

As revealed in the table 2, the Cronbach alpha coefficient is used to determine the internal consistency of the measures. The results showed that the constructs attained a reasonable level of internal consistency. The convergent validity was achieved

since AVE were higher than the cutoff point of a minimum 50%. With respect to the discriminant validity, the data confirm that all the constructs are distinct as indicated by the HTMT ratio of < 0.85 threshold.

Table 3: Structural Model and Objectives

Paths	B	T	P values	R ²	f ²	Q ²
Risk-taking Behaviour				0.346		0.145
Decision-Making				0.385		0.127
Peer pressure -> Risk-taking Behaviour	0.431	7.807	0.000		0.175	
Decision-Making -> Risk-taking Behaviour	0.214	3.372	0.001		0.043	
Peer pressure -> Decision-Making	0.620	18.799	0.000		0.625	
Peer pressure -> Decision-Making -> Risk-taking Behaviour	0.133	3.265	0.001			

As depicted in Table 3, the structural model showed a significant relationship existing between peer pressure, decision making and risk-taking behaviour. It

revealed a strong positive relationship between peer pressure and decision making ($\beta=0.62$, $t=18.799$, $p<.001$), explaining an appreciable proportion of

variance in decision making ($R^2=0.385$) with a large effect size ($f^2=0.625$), showing that peer pressure predominantly predicts decision making.

The data revealed that peer pressure significantly affects risk-taking behaviour ($\beta=0.431$, $t=7.807$, $p<.001$) with a moderate effect size ($f^2(0.175)$). The results also found that decision making has a positive effect on risk-taking behaviour ($\beta = 0.214$, $t = 3.372$, $p = .001$) with a relatively small effect size ($f^2=0.043$).

The findings reveal a statistically significant positive relationship between decision-making and risk-taking behaviour among pre-service teachers ($\beta = 0.214$, $t = 3.372$, $p = 0.001$). This suggests that improved decision-making competence is associated with an increased likelihood of engaging in risk-taking behaviour. Importantly, the magnitude of the effect, though modest ($f^2 = 0.043$), is substantively meaningful within educational contexts where behaviour is shaped by multiple interacting psychological and social variables.

The results on the mediation effect showed that decision making moderately mediates the relationship between peer pressure and risk-taking behaviour ($\beta=0.133$, $t=3.265$, $p<.001$), demonstrating that risk-taking behaviour is influenced by peer pressure both directly and indirectly through decision-making processes. The overall effect is that the model explained 34.6% of the variance in risk-taking behaviour ($R^2 = 0.346$). The predictive relevance of the model was supported by positive Q^2 values for both decision-making ($Q^2 = 0.127$) and risk-taking behaviour ($Q^2 = 0.145$), indicating adequate out-of-sample predictive power.

DISCUSSION

Pre-Service Teachers' Peer Pressure on Their Decision-Making Process

The study revealed that a significantly strong positive relationship exists between

pre-service teachers' peer pressure and their decision-making process. This implies that as peer pressure of pre-service teachers increase, they are more likely to match their decisions with peer anticipation. Empirical evidence shows that peer pressure can exert a substantial influence on students' decision-making processes in both affirmative and detrimental ways (Bhujbal & Verma, 2024). This shows that human beings are gregarious in nature, thereby any decision taken by man will surely be influenced by society. The influence can either be positive or negative. The study supports the work of Radetic- Paic et al. (2022), who maintain that the teacher candidates are vulnerable to peer pressure, which can negatively influence their decision-making processes.

Pre-service teachers' peer pressure on risk-taking behaviour

The study also established that peer pressure has a significant positive effect on risk-taking behaviour among pre-service teachers. This suggests that the increase in pre-service teachers' peer pressure substantially led to a heightened likelihood of involvement in risk-taking behaviours. The high standardized coefficient shows that pre-service teachers' peer pressure is a strong determinant of risk-taking behaviour, demonstrating the fundamental role of social dynamics in determining behaviours. This study agrees with the work of Bhujbal and Verma (2024), who observed that peer pressure significantly influences risk-taking behaviors among pre-service teachers. However, the study also notes that positive outcomes, like increased motivation, can occur in certain contexts, emphasizing the complex nature of peer influence in educational settings. The study also confirms the finding of Charulatha (2024), who postulated that peer pressure influences risk-taking behaviours among individuals, more especially during adolescence and young adulthood.

Decision-Making on Risk-Taking Behaviour among Pre-Service Teachers

The study found that decision-making significantly influences risk-taking behaviour among pre-service teachers. The result suggests that pre-service teachers who demonstrate stronger decision-making competence are more inclined to engage in calculated and purposeful risk-taking rather than avoidance or reckless behaviour. This study aligns with the assertion that risk-taking in professional contexts is not inherently maladaptive but can serve as a catalyst for learning, experimentation, and growth. Hayes (1999) shows that the centrality of decision-making in instructional and classroom management practices, arguing that teachers constantly negotiate complex choices under conditions of uncertainty. Conversely, limited decision-making competence may lead to avoidance of necessary instructional risks or, in some cases, poorly reasoned actions, a concern earlier articulated by Stewart (1989).

Mediating Role of Decision-Making of Pre-Service Teachers in the Relationship between Peer Pressure and Risk-Taking Behaviour

The study on the mediating effect revealed that the decision-making of pre-service teachers moderately mediates the relationship between peer pressure and risk-taking behaviour. The effect of the mediation suggests that peer pressure does not automatically determine risk-taking behaviour. The effect emerges through thoughtful and cognitive processes that influence how the pre-service teachers understand and respond to social standards. This confirms the study of Verma (2024) and Bhattacharyya et al. (2020), who maintain that peer pressure can compromise autonomy and increase susceptibility to impulsive or maladaptive choices.

It is established that teacher candidates who have a high level of decision-making

competence can consciously assess social cues and anticipate the consequences of their actions, and engage in risk-taking that is deliberate and constructive, supporting adaptive professional behaviour (Hayes, 1999; Pesen & Epçacan, 2021; Weller et al., 2015).

However, the mediation is not absolute as empirical evidence showed that group norms and peer conformity can prompt risk-taking even among individuals with reflective decision-making skills, especially in environments where peer expectations are intense (Farly, 2013; Lucks et al., 2017). This demonstrates that while decision-making moderates the effect of peer pressure, the social environment retains the power to influence behaviour independently. Pre-service teachers' peer influence may function through compliance or identification, but the depth of internalization depends on the individual's decision-making competence. Eventually, the study findings show that decision-making serves as a regulatory mechanism that channels peer influence and promotes constructive engagement with risk. Developing decision-making competence within teacher education programmes is therefore critical to reducing maladaptive risk-taking and supporting reflective, growth-oriented behaviours in social and instructional contexts.

CONCLUSION

Base on the findings, the study concludes that, pre-service teachers' peer pressure shapes how people assess various alternatives and arrive at choices within educational and social contexts, affirming the centrality of social interaction in cognitive decision processes.

Also, exposure to peer pressure and social norms increases the probability of involvement in risk-based behaviour among pre-service teachers.

Finally, the study concludes that peer pressure affects risk-taking behaviour both

directly and indirectly through the pre-service teachers' cognitive evaluation and judgment processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study provides the following recommendations:

1. Teacher training courses should cover areas that provide a full orientation on peer pressure. The knowledge should be tailored towards empowering them on both positive and negative peer pressure, building on critical thinking and self-regulation among pre-service teachers.
2. The study recommended that colleges of education should provide a supportive peer environment that motivates constructive risk-taking, such as collaborative projects and supervised teaching practicum activities. Promoting positive peer norms can reduce engagement in harmful behaviours while reinforcing professional growth.
3. Colleges of education should endeavour to introduce policies and programs aimed at minimizing maladaptive risk-taking. The interventions could include peer-coaching schemes, mentorship programmes, and training in reflective decision-making.

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