

PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP FOR PUPILS' IMPROVED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC NIGERIA PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A SHIFT FROM AUTHORITY TO PARTNERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the need for paradigm shift from authority to partnership in parent-teacher relationship for pupils' improved academic performance in public primary schools in Nigeria. The paper argued that the authority-based model of parent-teacher relationship whereby teachers are seen as the experts of the instructional delivery process who call the shots and parents simply follow does not make for instructional effectiveness in the present age of information liberalization. The potentials of parents at contributing meaningfully to their children's learning and in support of teachers must thus be acknowledged and harnessed by teachers for optimal instructional effectiveness. The paper thus x-rayed concepts such as pupils' academic performance, parental involvement in pupils' academic performance, parent-teacher partnership, and strategies of parent-teacher partnership, such as open communication, feedback, mutual support, and parent-teacher conferences. These strategies were thoroughly reviewed in the light of existing literature on how they improve the performance of public primary school pupils in Nigeria. The challenges to effective implementation of this desired paradigm shift were also reviewed. The paper concluded that shifting from authority to partnership in parent-teacher relationship would assure improved pupils' learning outcomes, enhanced parent-teacher collaboration, stronger school-community relationship, more effective support for pupils' diverse needs, creating a positive inclusive school culture, parents empowerment and confidence, and better communication and understanding between parents and teachers, among other benefits. The paper also suggested among others that head teachers of public primary schools and the schools boards should periodically organize training sessions for teachers on effective relationship with parents and guardians of pupils.

Keywords: Parent-Teacher partnership, open communication, feedback, mutual support, parent-teacher conferences, improved pupils' performance.

Introduction

Teachers, learners, and the parents of learners make up the apparently most critical stakeholders of the primary school system. These three groups constitute what was referred

to by Nwadike et al. (2023) as the educational triangle – described as the tripod stand (3-legged stand) of the school system. The learners or pupils are at the centre of this relationship even as they are the reason for the school-based interaction between parents and the teachers in the school system. The nature and quality of this parent-teacher interaction or relationship significantly predicts several variables that underpin the success of every school, such as the school climate, funding of the school, the quality of decisions being made in the school, school improvement initiatives and implementation, and importantly - learners' performance, among others (Kulloma & Kolo, 2023). As such, emphasis on parent-teacher relationship has become a common chorus both in theory and in practice for the improvement of and goal attainment of schools in Nigeria and elsewhere.

However, it is observed that the implementation of parent-teacher relationship in public primary schools in Nigeria navigates towards an apparently less productive route with respect to improving pupils' performance, which should necessarily be the most important reason for the existence of this relationship. This appears so because when it comes to the business of instruction, teachers seem to assume an omniscient (all-knowing) position, and in most cases, have the first and final say. They "do all the talking" while parents do all the listening. Parents in most cases are relegated to the roles of simply supplying resources (financial and material) and taking instruction from teachers. Teachers are regarded as the experts and parents are mostly seen and also see themselves as the novices who receive guidance from teachers. As such, the relationship that exists between teachers' and parents with respect to the teaching and learning of pupils is traditionally authority-based – where teachers call the shots and parents simply hearken. This comes against the backdrop of the fact that parents possess human resources (skills, knowledge, expertise, information, etc) which if fully harnessed by school administrations, can tremendously improve the performance of teachers, pupils, and even school administrations.

It is no gainsaying that this traditional authority-based model of parent-teacher relationship approach can lead to power imbalances, marginalize parent voices, and hinder effective collaboration. As our education system evolves to meet the diverse needs of 21st-century learners, it's essential to re-imagine the parent-teacher relationship as a collaborative partnership. By shifting from authority to partnership, it may become possible for primary schools to foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, empower parents as equal partners in their child's education, enhance teacher morale and reduce burnout, improve student outcomes and academic success, and develop more effective communication and collaboration strategies. This shift requires a fundamental transformation in how we approach parent-teacher relationships, from a focus on authority and control to a culture of mutual respect, trust, and shared responsibility. This discourse explores strategies for making this shift, and how it can lead to more effective and equitable partnerships that support the success of all learners in public primary schools in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Primary Education Delivery in Nigeria

Primary education is the first level of formal education preceded by early childhood education. At this level, children are prepared for a broad-based education which emphasizes the attainment of permanent and functional literacy, numeracy and effective communication skills. It provides the basis for progressive learning of the child. In Nigeria, primary education

is defined as education given in an institution for children aged 6 to 11 plus. Since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. The duration shall be six years (FRN, 2004:14). It is likened to the builder's foundation, which determines the number of storeys a gigantic building can carry. 'Foundation' is primary education and 'gigantic building' is the entire system of education. Primary education is a major component of Nigeria's Universal Basic Education. It is free, compulsory and universal.

At this level of education, the curriculum offerings have been differentiated into several subject areas. These subjects are to be taught using practical, experimental and exploratory methods. In order to facilitate advancement of knowledge and skills necessary for effective functioning in the modern world, Information Communication Technology (ICT) has been integrated into the curriculum of Primary Schools. The objectives of primary education are as follows:

1. Inculcate permanent literacy (for reading) and numeracy (manipulation of numbers), and ability to communicate effectively.
2. Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
3. Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society.
4. Character molding and development of sound attitude and morals in the child.
5. Develop environmental adaptability skills in the child.
6. Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity.
7. Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality (FRN, 2014:14).

Achievement of these objectives will lay a solid foundation for the next subsequent higher levels of education (i.e. secondary and tertiary). The objectives are stated to reflect the three domains of learning: cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains and the teacher is at the centre of the realization of these lofty objectives.

Pupils' Academic Performance

Academic performance general knowledge is an individual's ability to achieve a given academic goal through effort, competence, or courage. According to Ali (2023), academic performance is an educational outcome that indicates how well a student or class of pupils is doing academically. For Nwankwoala (2021), academic performance is the observable and measurable behavior of pupils at any point in time. Nwankwoala further buttressed that it is a measure of how well a student, instructor, or institution has met its short or long-term educational objectives. In Nigerian public primary schools, this measure is generally determined through examination, ongoing evaluation, or common entrance examinations. Academic performance of public primary school pupils is thus a computed measure of pupils' academic outcomes which are a reflection of their academic abilities and efforts out into the teaching-learning process by both the pupil and the teachers.

The academic performance of pupils is a key indicator of an educational institution's effectiveness and success (Ojo, 2018). Apart from the fact that a child's academic performance showcases his level of academic competence, it is also a pointer to some other very important

information in the instructional process. For example, the performance of learners can reveal useful information about the quality and competence of the teacher (Amie-Ogan & Friday, 2020; Wordu & Isiah, 2020); the teachers' motivation, level of commitment and attitude towards students and teaching (Azubuike & Oko, 2016; Enwelim, 2016; Ojo, 2018); the appropriateness and effectiveness of the instructional methodology (Okwuduba & Okigbo, 2018); the state of physical, material and instructional facilities/resources in the school (Mvuyekule, 2017); etc., and can predict the child's future educational trajectory. All of these have implications for primary education administration in Nigeria and thus need to be critically examined by relevant stakeholders for the assurance of quality education that meets the educational needs of primary school pupils, ultimately targeting the realization of the set goals and objectives of this level of education in the country.

Parental Involvement and Pupils' Academic Performance

Epstein's framework of six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 2015) is among the most useful tools developed by the field thus far for defining parental involvement practices and linking them with certain type's outcomes. This widely accepted framework guides to help educators to develop comprehensive family-school partnerships. The six types of parental involvement include: parenting (helping families with childrearing and parenting skills), communicating (developing effective home-school communication), volunteering (creating ways that families can become involved in activities at the school), learning at home (supporting learning activities in the home that reinforce school curricula), decision-making (including families as decision-makers through school-sites councils and committees), and collaborating with community (matching community services with family needs and serving the community), (Epstein, 2015). Each type of involvement encompasses a variety of practices to be undertaken by teachers, parents, and pupils and is theoretically linked with a variety of distinct outcomes for pupils, teachers, and parents as well.

Educators, along with parents, are encouraged to select those practices likely to produce the types of outcomes that coincide most closely with their needs, goals, and capacities. Epstein emphasizes that not all parental involvement leads to improved student achievement. The selected results (produced by each of six types) that should help correct the misperception that any practice involving families will raise children's achievement test scores (Epstein, 2015). She further noted that while certain practices are likely to influence student's test scores, others are designed to produce outcomes related to attitude and behaviours. Epstein noted that many of the possible secondary or indirect effects of a particular parental involvement practice are not yet understood. For example, parental involvement in type three (Volunteering) or type five (Decision-making) activities may result first in parents' feeling more connected with their children's schools, which may, in turn, lead to other types of involvement that will eventually produce outcomes related to student achievement.

Parent-teacher Partnership

Parent-teacher partnership is the collaboration of parents with teachers in the instructional development of pupils. It is a process of role sharing between schools and homes in the academic development of learners. Teachers and parents recognize each other's usefulness and abilities in the development of the learner and complement each other's effort with the intent of helping pupils develop optimally. As much as teachers are experts in their own right, they also acknowledge their limitations and the strength of parents in such areas and hold

parents in high esteem in that regard, giving them free hand to contribute to the instructional process. As such, partnership requires that teachers and parents work as co-labourers towards the development of learners – providing each other with all necessary and needed supports and information. According to Epstein (2015) schools must help families create home environment that support learning by providing them with information about such issues as children's health, nutrition, discipline, adolescents' needs, and parenting approaches. At the same time, schools must seek to understand and incorporate aspects of their students' family life into what is taught in the classroom. Schools are challenged to ensure that all families who need this type of information receive it in appropriate ways.

Parent-Teacher Partnership Strategies for Pupils' Improved Academic Performance

Effective partnership of parents and teachers in the improvement of public primary school pupils' academic performance in Nigeria is dependent on the adoption of well-thought-of strategies that make for partnership productivity. Some of these strategies are highlighted in literature and they include open communication, feedback, mutual support, mutual trust and respect, parent-teacher conferences, among others (Luna & Del Valle, 2023). These are x-rayed under leaf in the light of the present discourse.

Parent-teacher Open Communication for Improved Pupils' Performance in Primary Schools in Nigeria

Communication is a central pillar in every successful relationship and this wholly applies in the collaboration of parents and teachers for improving primary school pupils' learning outcomes. Communication in this regard refers to the exchange of information, ideas or concerns between parents/guardians and teachers regarding a child's educational progress, well-being and development (Wali, 2021). Effective parent-teacher communication is a two-way process that involves mutual trust and optimism on the part of teachers that parents are capable of making useful contributions to pupils' learning. The process, according to Kaptich et al. (2019) and Sulyman (2023), should necessarily entail:

- a. Regular progress updates, whereby parents and teachers share regular progress reports, highlighting strengths and weaknesses;
- b. Open communication channels, whereby open communication is encouraged through email, chats, phone calls, or meetings;
- c. Volunteer opportunities, whereby parents are encouraged to volunteer in the classroom or school;
- d. Parent education, whereby parents are offered workshops or resources to help them support their children's learning;
- e. Translation Services, in which parents with language barriers are provided translation services;
- f. Parent-Teacher Association, to foster and promote active collaboration between parents and schools;
- g. Consistent communication from all teachers and staff; and
- h. Technology integration, whereby teachers leverage technology, such as parent-teacher communication apps, to enhance communication.

Effective parent-teacher communication helps to build trust and understanding, support student learning and achievement, address issues promptly, foster a sense of community, and promote student well-being and success.

Parent-Teacher Feedback for Improved Pupils' Performance in Primary Schools in Nigeria

In shifting from authority to partnership in parent-teacher relationships, teachers need to place value on feedback from parents concerning their children's performance. This will also require schools creating an avenue for such possibilities. Nnebedum and Akinfolarin (2018) described parent-teacher feedback as the exchange of information, ideas, and concerns between parents/guardians and teachers regarding a child's educational progress, well-being, and development. This two-way communication helps:

- a. Inform parents about their child's academic performance, strengths, and weaknesses.
- b. Share parents' observations, concerns, and insights about their child's learning and behavior.
- c. Collaborate on setting goals, developing strategies, and making decisions that support the child's learning and development.
- d. Address issues, questions, and concerns in a timely and constructive manner.
- e. Foster a partnership between parents and teachers to support the child's educational journey.

Parent-teacher feedback can take various forms, including parent-teacher conferences, progress reports, email or phone updates, volunteer opportunities, and parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings, among others. For this provision to be effective, Olaoye and Awogbeja (2023) opined that it must be carried out on regular basis, and must be open, honest, respectful, and focused on pupils' learning and wellbeing. When this is in place, parents and teachers may be able to work together to provide a supportive and inclusive environment that benefits pupils' educational and personal growth.

Parent-Teacher Mutual Support for Improved Pupils' Performance in Primary Schools in Nigeria Parent-Teachers Conferences

Parent-teacher mutual support refers to the collaborative relationship between parents and teachers, where both parties work together to support each other in ensuring the academic success, social development, and emotional well-being of students. Mutual support involves active communication, shared responsibility, trust and respect, collaborative problem-solving, open feedback, emotional support, resource sharing, and joint goal-setting. Pupils, parents, and teachers benefit from mutual support through improving student outcomes, enhancing teacher morale, increasing parental involvement, building stronger school-community relationships, and creating a supportive learning environment (Wali, 2021).

Parent-teacher mutual support acknowledges that: (a) parents are their child's first teachers, (b) teachers are experts in education, (c) both parties bring unique perspectives and strengths, and (d) collaboration is key to student success (Omemu, 2018). By working together, parents and teachers can provide a comprehensive support system that fosters pupils' learning growth, achievement, and well-being.

Parent-teacher mutual support is crucial for improved pupils' performance in ways such as:

- a. Personalized learning: Parents and teachers can share insights to create tailored learning plans.
- b. Consistent expectations: Collaborative efforts ensure consistent expectations and messages.

- c. Emotional support: Joint emotional support from parents and teachers enhances pupils' well-being.
- d. Academic reinforcement: Parents can reinforce classroom learning at home.
- e. Early intervention: Parents and teachers can identify and address learning difficulties early.
- f. Goal setting: Collaborative goal setting promotes pupil motivation and achievement.
- g. Progress monitoring: Regular progress updates and feedback facilitate data-driven instruction.
- h. Resource sharing: Parents and teachers can share resources, expertise, and knowledge.
- i. Building confidence: Mutual support fosters a positive learning environment, boosting pupils' confidence; and
- j. Accountability: Shared responsibility ensures parents and teachers stay committed to pupils' success.

When parents and teachers work together towards the instructional development of pupils, it creates a supportive network that enhances pupils' academic performance, social development, and emotional well-being.

Parent-Teacher Conferences for Improved Pupils' Performance in Primary Schools in Nigeria

Parent-teacher conferences (Parent-teacher conferences) are meetings between parents/guardians and teachers to discuss a student's academic progress, behavior, and overall well-being. These conferences provide an opportunity for:

- a. Progress updates: Whereby teachers share pupils' academic achievements, strengths, and weaknesses;
- b. Goal setting: Whereby parents and teachers collaborate to set goals and develop strategies for improvement;
- c. Addressing concerns: Whereby parents and teachers discuss concerns, issues, or challenges affecting the student's learning;
- d. Sharing perspectives: Whereby parents and teachers exchange information, insights, and observations about the student;
- e. Building relationships: Parent-teacher conferences foster positive relationships between parents, teachers, and students.
- f. Collaborative problem-solving: Parents and teachers work together to find solutions to support the student's learning.
- g. Keeping parents informed: Whereby teachers update parents on curriculum, classroom activities, and school events;
- h. Encouraging parental involvement: Parent-teacher conferences promote parental engagement in their child's education (Nnebedum & Akinfolarin, 2018; Omemu, 2018).

Parent-teacher conferences are typically held regularly (e.g., quarterly or semester), as needed (e.g., to address specific concerns), and at the request of either parents or teachers, and for it to be effective, it has to be underlined by features such as active listening, open communication, respectful dialogue, collaborative mindset, and pupil-centered focus (Omemu, 2018).

Parent-teacher conferences can significantly contribute to pupils' improved performance by:

- a. Setting goals and targets: Collaborative goal-setting helps pupils stay focused and motivated.
- b. Identifying strengths and weaknesses: Understanding pupils' strengths and weaknesses enables targeted support;
- c. Developing personalized learning plans: Tailored plans address specific needs and learning styles;
- d. Improving communication: Regular updates and open communication ensure parents and teachers are aligned;
- e. Enhancing parental involvement: Engaged parents support learning at home, reinforcing classroom instruction;
- f. Addressing challenges early: Early intervention helps overcome obstacles before they impact performance;
- g. Fostering positive relationships: Strong parent-teacher relationships create a supportive learning environment;
- h. Encouraging pupil reflection: Pupils take ownership of their learning, setting goals and self-assessing progress;
- i. Sharing resources and expertise: Parents and teachers pool knowledge and resources to support pupils;
- j. Monitoring progress: Regular conferences ensure pupils stay on track, making adjustments as needed.

Challenges to Effectively Shifting from Authority to Partnership in Parent-Teacher Relationship in Primary Schools in Nigeria

Shifting from an authority-based to a partnership-based parent-teacher relationship in primary schools in Nigeria can be really challenging due to some factors highlighted in literature (Ezekiel-Hart, 2013; Obigwu, 2020). These include among others:

1. Traditional mindsets: Parents and teachers may be accustomed to a hierarchical relationship, making it difficult to adopt a collaborative approach.
2. Communication barriers: Different communication styles, language barriers, or lack of regular communication can hinder effective partnership.
3. Trust and rapport: Building trust and rapport between parents and teachers takes time, effort, and consistency.
4. Power dynamics: Teachers may feel uncomfortable sharing authority or decision-making with parents.
5. Parental involvement: Some parents may not be willing or able to participate in partnerships due to various reasons (e.g., work, lack of education, or cultural barriers).
6. Teacher training: Teachers may need training to develop facilitation skills, active listening, and conflict resolution strategies.
7. Time constraints: Finding time for regular meetings and collaborative work can be challenging for both parents and teachers.
8. Cultural and socioeconomic differences: Different cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses can lead to diverse expectations and communication styles.
9. Balancing roles: Teachers may struggle to balance their authority as educators with their role as partners with parents.
10. School policies and structures: Existing school policies and structures may not support or facilitate partnership-based relationships.

Conclusion

The need for paradigm shift from authority-based to partnership-based model in parent-teacher relationship has become sacrosanct for improved performance of public primary school pupils in Nigeria especially at a time as this when knowledge has been so highly liberalized, such that teachers are no more the sole custodians of knowledge, as parents also possess a lot of skills, experiences and expertise that are of immense usefulness to the instructional delivery process. This would assure improved student outcomes, enhanced parent-teacher collaboration, stronger school-community relationship, more effective support for pupils' diverse needs, creating a positive inclusive school culture, parents empowerment and confidence, and better communication and understanding between parents and teachers, among other benefits.

The paper thus x-rayed effective ways through which this paradigm shift can be made. Teachers rather than posing as the all-knowing experts of the instructional process in public primary schools could leverage on partnering with parents of pupils for their own benefits and for enhancing the productivity of the instructional delivery process. Teachers can effectively exploit the knowledge and instructional potentials possessed by most parents, together with the high amount and high quality of useful information about their children which are needed for teachers' effective job performance. Besides, learning does not end in school. It continues in the home. As such, the need for teachers to recognize the potentials of parents and to collaborate with them in the teaching-learning process becomes imperative for effective attainment of instructional goals. It is only by so doing that improvement in learning outcomes of public primary school pupils in Nigeria could be guaranteed.

Suggestions

Based on the discourse and the conclusion, the following suggestions are made:

1. Head teachers of public primary schools and the schools boards should periodically organize training sessions for teachers on effective relationship with parents and guardians of pupils.
2. Head teachers and schools management boards should strengthen Parent-Teacher Associations in their schools to foster collaboration and communication.
3. Parents and teachers of public primary schools in Nigeria should hold regular meetings to discuss pupils' progress and address concerns.
4. Head teachers should encourage open communication channels, such as suggestion boxes, e-mail addresses, and social media platforms for parents to share concerns and ideas.
5. Head teachers and teachers should provide opportunities for parents to volunteer in special classroom sessions (like in teaching of vocational subjects like Home Economics practical sessions or any special handicrafts) and in school events, promoting involvement and collaboration. Parents with flourishing businesses could be invited to the school as facilitators on special occasions.

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