

Navigating Parental Engagement and Lower Basic School Success in Nigeria: Insights from Recent Research and Effective Practices

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Abstract

The role of parents in supporting their children's learning is fundamental in shaping not only the academic outcomes but also the overall development of basic school pupils. Thus, if it is not taken seriously or neglected, can have adverse consequences on children and their future. This research is aimed at advocating for sustained parental engagement for basic school pupils, as it has been revealed to be a treasure, a hidden driver and a key catalyst that shapes and directs children towards a balanced positive future. The study used an extensive literature search to elucidate the concept of parental engagement, explored the various facets of parental engagement, and analysed four theories that correlate with parental engagement, specifically attachment theory, ecological systems theory, social capital theory, and modelling theory. Further literature search was carried out to enunciate key factors of parental engagement and academic achievement which revealed that pupils who feel supported by their parents are more likely to develop positive relationships with peers and teachers, exhibit fewer behavioural problems, and demonstrate higher levels of self-esteem. The study concluded that parental engagement is a powerful driver of success in primary education, influencing not only academic outcomes but also the social and emotional development of pupils. Some recommendations were made including that schools should strive to establish and use multiple effective channels of communication between the school and parents, including digital platforms, to keep parents informed and engaged in their pupils' progress; the government should strengthen its backup plans and allocate more resources to lessen the impact of global crises on parental engagement and pupils' academic performance.

Key Words: Academic outcomes, Attachment, Ecological, Lower basic school, Parental engagement

Introduction

Basic education aims to equip pupils with fundamental life skills, including responsibility and an appreciation for diverse perspectives. However, the landscape of basic education has undergone significant changes due to various factors. Researchers have identified a wide range of influences on educational outcomes, including parental engagement, teacher effectiveness, teacher-student relationships, available resources, stress and stability, school climate, peer relationships, intrinsic motivation, intelligence, and cognitive and emotional factors (Hattie, 2009; World Bank, 2018; American Psychological Association, 2019). Among these, parental engagement stands out as a critical factor, especially in the context of the evolving role of parents in their children's education (Nakada *et. al.*, 2020).

Although often overlooked, the role of parents in supporting their pupils' learning is fundamental, shaping not only academic outcomes but also the overall development of pupils in basic education. A study in the United Kingdom (UK) revealed that parental engagement became a cornerstone of primary pupils' academic success following a paradigm shift in educational approaches (Krishnan *et. al.*, 2020). This shift underscores the significant impact of parents who create a supportive and productive learning environment, challenging the traditional view that education occurs solely within the confines of the school.

Historically, parental involvement in education was often limited to attending meetings, conferences, and participating in extracurricular activities, which was considered sufficient for engagement (Avezova, 2023). This limited view suggested that further parental involvement in their pupils' schooling was unnecessary (Pardi *et al.*, 2020). However, the unpredictability and rapidly changing dynamics of the postmodern world have led to new educational theories, emphasising that a child's optimal development requires a sustained partnership between home and school (Pardi *et. al.*, 2020).

Research has shown that consistent and sustained parental engagement significantly influences the academic trajectory of basic school pupils (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Eccles & Harold, 2013).

Parents are increasingly recognized not just as observers but as active participants in their children's education (Whalley & Chandler, 2017; Kent *et. al.*, 2022). For instance, studies indicate that primary school pupils in African nations like Nigeria and the UK benefit substantially from parental involvement in their education (Adewusia *et. al.*, 2024). Moreover, research and policy initiatives have highlighted that pupils' home environments, shaped by their health, happiness, and parental engagement, play a crucial role in their academic success (Van *et. al.*, 2020).

As more studies link parental engagement with educational success, many schools have begun to adapt their policies to reflect this understanding (Smith *et. al.*, 2021). This aligns with Whalley and Chandler's (2017) concept of parents as co-educators, transforming their children's learning into an interactive, collaborative experience.

Considering this evolving understanding, this discourse seeks to:

1. Clarify the concept of parental engagement;
2. Explore the various dimensions of parental engagement; and
3. Analyse four theories that correlate with parental engagement.

The Concept of Parental Engagement

Parental engagement refers to the active and meaningful involvement of parents in their children's education. This engagement extends beyond attending parent-teacher meetings; it includes helping with homework, participating in school events, maintaining regular communication with teachers, and creating a supportive learning environment at home (Epstein, 2011). The concept also involves setting expectations for academic performance and fostering a positive attitude towards education. Parental engagement, encompassing both involvement and participation, connects extracurricular activities and interests that traditional field trips often miss, demonstrating the multifaceted ways in which parents contribute to their children's schooling (Emerson *et. al.*, 2012; Goodall, 2021).

In primary schools, parental engagement typically involves a collaborative effort between parents and the school, both working towards the shared goal of the child's success. While some schools may encourage more active involvement from parents, the essence of parental engagement lies in this partnership, which often manifests as a healthy dialogue between the two parties (Hussain *et. al.*, 2021). Research by Dumay *et. al.*, (2014) shows that parental engagement in early schooling positively impacts academic performance. Gonzalez *et. al.*, (2018) further highlights that students whose parents place a high value on education tend to achieve better academic outcomes than those whose parents do not. The quality of parent-child interaction, especially when parents are actively involved in their children's education, is a significant factor in academic success (Hussain *et. al.*, 2021). Recognizing this, policy developers increasingly integrate parental engagement into educational policies to enhance student academic progress (Bunijevac, 2017).

Epstein (2024) defines and quantifies parental engagement as the positive attitudes parents hold towards their children's education and the activities they engage in, both at home and in the classroom. Multiple studies have explored the different effects of these attitudes and activities. For instance, Utami (2022) found that parental involvement in schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and communication with teachers is linked to improved academic performance. Additionally, Guzikova and Mendelova (2022) observed that parents' attitudes toward their children's academic success are influenced by their level of education and the value they place on education within the family, with a higher correlation seen in families with higher socioeconomic status. However, Bodur and Aktan (2021) and Chen *et. al.*, (2023) note that there is still limited understanding of how parents' values towards their children's education impact academic outcomes. This suggests that parental values, socio-economic status, and education level are important factors that contribute to a child's academic success.

Gonzalez *et. al.*, (2018) underscore the importance of further research into parental engagement activities and other parenting behaviours that influence children's learning and academic

performance. This research could inform the development of programmes aimed at supporting children's academic success. Although Hill and Craft (2003) point out that the precise relationship between parental engagement and a child's academic outcome remains unclear, gaining a deeper understanding of these mechanisms could lead to more effective intervention programmes that improve student performance. The foregoing discourse suggests that parental engagement is a critical factor in achieving positive academic outcomes, fostering social engagement, and supporting overall child development.

Facets of Parental Engagement

Parental engagement in primary education encompasses a variety of activities that extend beyond traditional roles and involvement (Emerson *et. al.*, 2012; Abella *et. al.*, 2024). One key facet is effective communication between parents and teachers, which aims to bridge the gap between school and home. According to Tan *et. al.*, (2020), this communication is crucial for breaking down barriers and fostering a collaborative relationship. Kincade (2020) emphasises that when parents and teachers share information about a pupil's strengths and areas for improvement, it builds a strong partnership that keeps parents informed and involved in their pupil's education.

Another important aspect of parental engagement is homework assistance. Froiland (2021) describes this as a direct contribution to a child's learning experience. This facet involves not only helping pupils complete their assignments but also creating a supportive classroom-like environment at home (Froiland, 2021). Parents who assist their primary pupils with homework typically exhibit a positive attitude toward learning and a commitment to their pupils' academic success (Yahaya, 2020). However, Anwar *et. al.*, (2022) challenge this as overloaded homework and insufficient support from schools can hinder effective parental involvement.

Active participation in extracurricular activities is another significant facet of parental engagement. Oh and Pomerantz (2022) highlight how parents' involvement in activities such as sports events, parent-teacher conferences, and school-related gatherings demonstrates their understanding of the importance of holistic education. These activities positively influence

children's development during their early years in school (Otani, 2020). Additionally, parents' participation in school decision-making processes by offering insights and feedback can provide valuable support and resources to schools (Kubin, 2021; Tamboto *et. al.*, 2024; Kong & Yasmin, 2022). However, Oh and Pomerantz (2022) caution that parent-teacher conferences often focus more on academic performance than on discussing parents' roles in their children's education, which can affect the level of parental engagement.

Another facet of parental engagement involves creating an optimal learning environment at home tailored to a child's unique educational needs. Piliyes *et. al.*, (2020) emphasize that personalizing the learning atmosphere helps acknowledge each child's unique learning style (Dutsinma *et. al.*, 2018). However, Sujarwo *et. al.*, (2020) note that socioeconomic status can impact a parent's ability to provide such an environment.

The advent of technology has also introduced new facets of parental engagement. Digital communication methods, such as email and online platforms, have enhanced the way parents, students, and teachers communicate about school events (Ewin *et. al.*, 2021). Bendig *et. al.*, (2020) highlight that technology allows parents to engage with school activities remotely, overcoming geographical and time constraints. These virtual mediums have enabled schools to interact with parents in innovative and inclusive ways, further broadening the scope of parental engagement (Ewin *et. al.*, 2021). Collectively, these various facets of parental engagement illustrate how parents contribute to their children's academic success through diverse means, leveraging their individual strengths and resources. Each facet plays a vital role in ensuring that children receive the support they need to thrive in their educational journey.

Correlating Theories of Parental Engagement

Several theories offer insights into the mechanisms and reasons behind parental engagement in children's lives (Lawrence & Fakuade, 2021). Such theories include attachment theory, ecological systems theory, social capital theory, and modelling theory. Together they provide a comprehensive understanding of how and why parents are involved in their children's primary

education (Tan *et.al.*, 2020). This research explores three of these theories: ecological systems theory, modelling theory, and attachment theory,

Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory presents a nuanced view of human development by recognising the multiple layers of influence that shape a person's growth (Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). The theory emphasises the importance of the relationships between children and their immediate environments, particularly how these interactions impact their development during the early years of school (Guy-Evans, 2020). According to Gao *et. al.*, (2023), the microsystems within this theory, such as the family and school environments, form the foundation of a child's sense of value. Kitson *et. al.*, (2022) further note that these microsystems can be used to understand a child's initial engagement with their surroundings and how this engagement influences their development. As part of the family microsystem, parents play a direct role in shaping their child's development through various forms of engagement (Faraz & Ahmed, 2021). This includes creating a supportive home environment that fosters learning (Piliyesiet. *al.*, 2020). Granlund and Roll-Pettersson (2001) add that teachers, who are integral to the school microsystem, also have a significant influence on a child's daily experiences.

Beyond the microsystem, the mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner's theory describes the interactions among different microsystems, such as the family and school. Daradkeh (2023) explains that the mesosystem captures how parental engagement is facilitated through these interactions (Hogberg *et. al.*, 2020). When parents and teachers maintain strong communication and collaboration, it creates an optimal environment for the child's development (Otani, 2020).

Ecological systems theory highlights the complex and interconnected factors that influence parental engagement. By recognising the roles of different systems - from the immediate family to broader cultural contexts - this theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how parents contribute to their child's educational journey. This theory underscores the importance of understanding the dynamic and evolving nature of these environments,

particularly in the context of technological advancements. Nobre (2020) argues that parents who adapt to these changing environments can significantly enhance their engagement in their child's education. Thus, effective collaboration between parents, schools, and policymakers, as suggested by Martinello (2020), can greatly improve the outcomes of this engagement. This diagram visually represents the various components of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

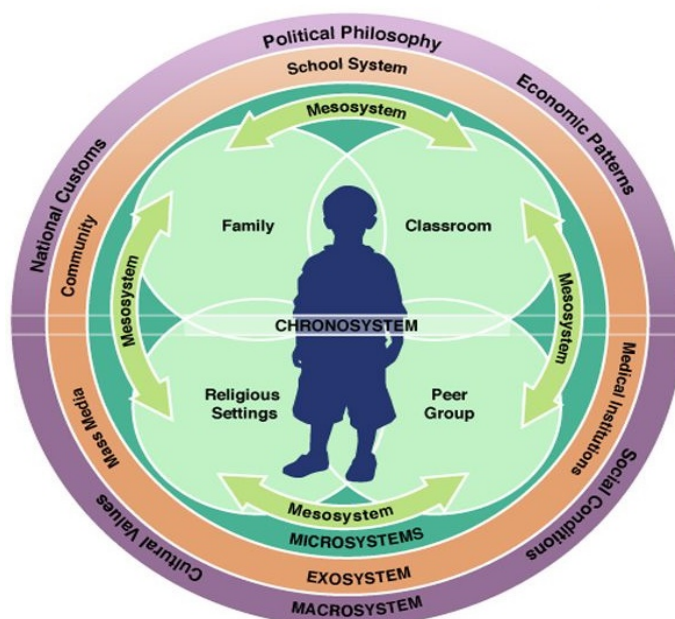


Figure 1: Ecological systems theory

Source: [M03: WRAP-Up: Making Access Happen \(ctejuhu.org\)](https://ctejuhu.org)

Modelling Theory in Parental Engagement

Modelling Theory, rooted in social learning principles, provides a valuable framework for understanding the dynamics of parental engagement and its impact on children's development (Bandura, 2021). Central to this theory is the idea that children learn by observing and imitating the behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs of significant adults, particularly their parents (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). According to Bandura (2021), parents serve as primary role models, shaping how children perceive and approach various aspects of life, including education. When parents exhibit enthusiasm for learning, demonstrate a strong work ethic, and value education,

their children are more likely to develop a lifelong love of learning and adopt similar attitudes toward their own education (Galanaki&Malafantis, 2022). This modelling of problem-solving strategies, work habits, and socio-emotional skills profoundly influences children's own approaches to challenges, social interactions, and ethical development (Bandura, 2021).

In practice, Modelling Theory highlights the importance of parental involvement in schools. Parents who actively engage, show interest, and model resilience during challenges help foster positive attitudes towards learning in their children (Bandura, 2021). Furthermore, the theory emphasizes that the interactions between parents and children are reciprocal; parents are also influenced by their children's responses and actions. This dynamic reinforces the idea that parental engagement not only aids in academic success but also contributes to the overall personal and social development of children (Galanaki&Malafantis, 2022).By acknowledging the profound influence parents have as role models, Modelling Theory underscores the broader role of parental engagement. This role extends beyond academics to include the cultivation of values, principles, and habits that prepare children to thrive in a complex and evolving world (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

Attachment Theory

John Bowlby's Attachment Theory explores the crucial role of early emotional bonds and their long-term effects on development (Jarvis *et. al.*, 2022). The theory posits that an individual's social and emotional growth is profoundly influenced by early interactions with caregivers, emphasizing the evolutionary significance of these bonds for survival and well-being (Lockyer, 2022; Walsh *et. al.*, 2023).Attachment Theory identifies four primary attachment styles, each linked to different patterns of parental engagement:

1. **Secure Attachment:** This style emerges from consistent and responsive caregiving, which fosters a foundation of trust and security (Girmeet. *al.*, 2020). According to Bretherton (2014), parents who are reliably supportive and provide guidance contribute to their children's academic motivation and success.

2. **Insecure-Avoidant Attachment:** Characterized by a lack of responsiveness from parents, this style results in emotional independence and a diminished ability to view parents as role models (Jarvis *et. al.*, 2022). Bretherton (2014) notes that such disengagement can negatively impact a child's perception of parental support and involvement in their education.
3. **Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment:** This style is marked by over-involvement and excessive concern from parents regarding their child's performance, often leading to a controlling approach (Odenweller *et. al.*, 2014). While intended to support, this can hinder a child's autonomy and foster resistance, which may affect the effectiveness of parental engagement (Odenweller *et. al.*, 2014).
4. **Disorganized Attachment:** Resulting from inconsistent and unpredictable parenting, this style is characterized by confusion and uncertainty in the child's relationships (Bretherton, 2014). Parents with this attachment style struggle to respond coherently to their child's needs, impacting the child's ability to form stable and trusting relationships (Jarvis *et. al.*, 2022).

The attachment Theory underscores the significance of early relationships in shaping a child's future interactions and educational experiences. The attachment style formed in childhood influences how individuals relate to others throughout their lives, including their ability to engage in educational settings (Jarvis *et. al.*, 2022).

According to O'Connor *et. al.*, (2020), Attachment Theory serves as a fundamental concept that links humanity's complex web of relationships. The influence of early positive emotional interactions extends profoundly across all stages of human development, from infancy to adult interpersonal relationships (Jarvis *et. al.*, 2022).

Below graphic illustrates these attachment styles and their implications for parental engagement.



Figure 2: Attachment Theory

Source: The Most Basic Concept of Attachment Theory

Exploring these three theories - Ecological Systems Theory, Modelling Theory, and Attachment Theory - reveals their diverse impacts on parental engagement in children's education. These theories highlight the various dimensions and degrees of influence that affect parental involvement, demonstrating their crucial role in shaping educational outcomes. Understanding these theories' nuances is essential for comprehending how they contribute to or detract from effective parental engagement and, consequently, students' success.

Key Factors of Parental Engagement and Academic Achievement

Research consistently underscores the significant role of parental engagement in predicting academic success. Active involvement by parents typically leads to better academic performance, higher motivation, and improved study habits among children (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). For example, Fan and Chen (2001) demonstrated a strong positive relationship between parental involvement and students' academic achievement across different grade levels, a connection that persists irrespective of socioeconomic status, highlighting that the benefits of parental engagement extend beyond economic constraints.

In Nigeria, key factors influencing parental engagement in education include parents' socio-economic status, education level, and familiarity with technology (Owolaye-Abdulganiyu & Olokooba, 2024; Eden *et. al.*, 2024)). Open communication between home and school is crucial, as emphasized by Anierobi and Unachukwu (2020) and Adimora, Onyishi, and Ucheaga, (2019). Evidence suggests that students perform better academically when their parents participate in extracurricular activities and maintain regular communication with teachers (Anierobi & Unachukwu (2020). Nudging interventions, such as sending text message reminders, have proven effective in encouraging parents to set goals for their children, leading to increased engagement and improved academic outcomes (Owolaye-Abdulganiyu & Olokooba, 2024: Eden *et. al.*, 2024).

Support networks for parents and schools' commitment to inclusive education also play a vital role (Brydges & Mkandawire, 2020; Eze *et. al.*, 2021). Inclusive education ensures that a diverse range of students, including those with special needs, have access to quality educational opportunities. The quality of the home environment – encompassing resources, guidance, and support – is a critical factor affecting academic achievement (Eze *et. al.*, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the challenges of parental disengagement and its adverse effects on students' learning (Bubb & Jones, 2020; Azubuike *et. al.*, 2021). Disruptions in school routines underscored the need for continued access to educational resources like the internet and ICT gadgets. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration among the community, schools, parents, and government to support students' learning and well-being during crises (Eze *et. al.*, 2021). Beyond academic achievement, parental engagement significantly impacts children's social and emotional development. Engaged parents foster a sense of security and self-worth in their children, which contributes to positive peer and teacher relationships, fewer behavioural issues, and higher self-esteem (Hill & Tyson, 2009). This comprehensive development is essential for success both in school and in life.

Conclusion

Parental engagement is a crucial driver of success in primary education, shaping not just academic outcomes but also the social and emotional growth of children. To unlock the full potential of students and set them on a path to lifelong success, schools must actively engage and empower parents as key partners in education. This study indicates that socio-economic factors significantly hinder parental participation in Nigeria, resulting in poor learning outcomes. Parents with higher education levels or even basic subject knowledge tend to be more involved, assisting with homework and ensuring their children understand classroom concepts. However, not all families have equal access to the necessary tools, such as educational resources and digital literacy, to support their children's success. Given the growing evidence of the impact of parental engagement, educators, policymakers, and communities must unite to support and equip parents. Lasting academic improvements hinge on strong school-family partnerships that amplify parents' voices in their children's education.

Suggestions

From the foregoing, it is expedient to note that schools must collaborate with government to close socio-economic gaps and ensure that all families engage effectively in their children's education. To this end, the following recommendations were made:

1. Schools should ensure the establishment of diverse, effective communication channels between parents and the school like phone messaging, Whatsapp group messaging, and other digital platforms. This will help to keep parents informed, engaged, and feeling a sense of ownership over their children's progress.
2. Government, the school and other non-government organisations should learn to offer some targeted support programmes, particularly during crises like COVID-19, to enhance families' proficiency in using digital tools and resources, thereby reducing disparities in parental engagement.

3. The school should develop and offer training programmes annually for new educators and parents on effective communication strategies to foster collaboration, which is essential to help them be effectively engaged and can boost their pupils' achievement.
4. The school and parents' representatives should actively encourage parental involvement through flexible meeting times and workshops that educate parents on supporting their children's learning, and creating a school environment that values and incorporates parental input.
5. The government and other non-governmental organisations should work towards strengthening government backup plans and allocating resources to mitigate the impact of global crises on parental engagement and student outcomes, thereby ensuring that educational disruptions are minimised.

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