

# Parental Communication Patterns and Children's Academic Performance in Cameroon

Dr. KUMNCHO Eveline Neh

Department Of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University Of Buea.

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**\*Corresponding Author**

Kumncho Eveline Neh

**E-mail:** lukongemms\_20@yahoo.com

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## ABSTRACT

This study was anticipated to identify the relationship between parental communication and students' academic performance among secondary school students in Cameroon. Theoretically, solitary would expect parental involvement to be more effective for school success when parents are more educated. But empirical evidence, mostly based on U.S. datasets, provides inconsistent findings. This paper hypothesizes that parental participation through parenting and communication types of involvement will give children an advantage towards academic achievement. This paper examines the association of parental communication patterns as, a form of parental involvement, and academic achievement in a purely African context. A Purposive sampling technique was used to select six secondary schools that make up the sample of this study. The research hypothesis that guided the study were that parental communication patterns affect students' academic performance. The survey design was used for the study and the research instrument used was the questionnaire. This instrument was administered to 300 Form three students, 149 males and 151 females. The data were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result of the analysis reveals that the calculated  $\Gamma_{xy}$  -value of 0.14 is greater than the critical  $\Gamma_{xy}$  -value of 0.133 at .05 level of significance with 298 degrees of freedom. With the result of the analysis, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis upheld. This result therefore means that the regular communication with children significantly influences the academic performance of secondary school students. This implies that parental participation plays a pivotal role in motivating children to improve their academic grades. For students to reap maximum benefits in an education system, the learning should not be solely left to the student-teacher relationship but should be extended to include active parental involvement among other education stakeholders.

## INTRODUCTION

Research provides inconsistent findings regarding the importance of parent-child communication and other forms of parental involvement activities to children's school success (Domina, 2005; Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Mattingly, Prislun, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002). Some studies report positive associations with academic achievement (Hong & Ho, 2005; Houtenville & Conway, 2008; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004), other studies indicate no association (Barnard, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001; Mattingly et al., 2002; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008), and even others point to negative associations (Coleman & McNeese, 2009; Domina, 2005; Fan, 2001; Muller, 1995). In particular, reported evidence of negative or no association with academic achievement is at odds with a widespread belief of positive parental involvement influences and difficult to reconcile with related theoretical work (Epstein, 1987). Several methodological and theoretical aspects that condition the influence of parental involvement likely explain these mixed and, apparently, discouraging results: the research design, the developmental stage of students, the type of parental involvement strategy considered, and the interaction with family socioeconomic status (SES).

Parents and teachers are two of the most important contributors to a student's educational success. When parents and teachers communicate well with one another, they are able to support student learning together. As such, communication between home and school is vital. However, parents and teachers do not usually have obvious opportunities for interaction. Rather, one party must intentionally reach out to the other for communication to take place. Thankfully, the use of technologies such as email, texting, websites, electronic portfolios and online grade books have made communication between parents and teachers more timely, efficient, productive and satisfying (cf., Merkley, Schmidt, Dirksen & Fuhler, 2006). Communication between parents and teachers can impact student learning according to new research in neuroscience. For example, research shows that the quality of students' learning environments critically influences their learning. The brain's capacity to make neural connections (in other words, to learn) is diminished when sleep, nutrition and social needs are not met. Furthermore, taking full advantage of the brain's plasticity (it is ability to adapt to change at the neural level) requires a holistic approach to learning where the student's physical and intellectual welfare are supported (OECD, 2007).

Moreover, research shows that students who are overstressed are not able to learn efficiently because the release of the stress hormone, cortisol, interferes with memory formation. Likewise, when a student's home and school environments are calming, the student's brain is able to learn efficiently (Goleman, 1997; Tennant, 2005). These new insights from

neuroscience serve to emphasize the importance of creating strong support systems for students both at home and at school to increase learning. One way to facilitate this rounded approach is to ensure regular communication between home and school. Parents can send teachers an email to let them know when the home learning environment may be holding back a student's progress. This paper therefore, seeks to add more evidence to the strength of the relationship between parental participation through reflective communication and student academic performance.

## Situating the study within existing literature

Numerous education research studies have provided consistent evidence on interconnections between families, schools and communities in enhancing children's growth, development and learning (Albright, Weissberg, & Dusenbury, 2011; Boethel et al., 2004; Epstein, 2001). The comprehensive framework by Epstein (1995) details the six types of the parental involvement on their children's learning outcomes. This framework remains the most useful tool that links parental participation with learning outcomes within the three overlapping spheres of family, school and community. The six types of parental involvement are parenting, communication, volunteering, learning-at-home, decision-making and community collaboration. Each of these participation types has a significant and unique influence on the child's growth, development and learning, and of course on parents, school and community as well (Rafiq et al., 2013). To mention but a few, the author briefly describes the six types of parental involvement and the benefits to the students only while making reference from the book "Perspectives and previews on research and policy for school, family and community partnerships" Epstein (1995). The six types are:

### Parenting as a contextual process for building parent-child communication

This summarizes helping families to establish a home environment that supports children as students. First, schools should help parents with information on how to create a conducive learning environment at home. This is can be achieved through sharing information related to parenting approaches which include child's health, nutrition, discipline and adolescence. In return, the schools should endeavour to assimilate and incorporate the students' family life orientation into what is taught in the classroom. The benefits of the parenting type of involvement to the student include improved discipline, improved school attendance, increased learning time and understanding the importance of schooling later in life (Epstein, 1995)

### Communication dynamics

This involves the two-way information sharing between the school and the parents regarding school programmes and students' progress. Schools are encouraged to devise various modes of relaying information between the school (teachers) and the family (students). In many instances, parents are encouraged to contact schools at onset of each grade entry. Various forms can be adopted which may include periodical parent-teacher meetings, telephone conversation and messaging, social media platform and student's report card. This creates a positive communication link which forms the basis of discussion in case the student develops problems later in the year. Students who enjoy such communication benefits have improved knowledge of their academic progress, improved school attendance, more decisive on courses they are undertaking, improved communication skills and better understanding of school rules, regulations and policies (Epstein, 1995).

### **Volunteering**

A volunteer is any individual who desires to develop or support school goals for the benefit of students' learning. The schools therefore should adopt ways which encourage family individuals to volunteer and participate in school activities and events, especially parents with special talents. Such volunteers could be assigned to be a class parent, mentor students during school open forums, organise school visits with established role models, participate in school communal work and join students during sporting activities. Students who enjoy such voluntary participation by their parents develop enhanced communication skills with older individuals, become exposed to life outside school and they also emulate the volunteers and carry it on in their future life development (Epstein, 1995).

### **Learning at home**

By nature, home becomes the first school that all students attend as parents actively engage with children during their development cycle. In this regard, schools should help parents with interactive activities which enhance learning activities similar to those taught in school. These may include: assisting parents to understand some activities in the school curriculum which their children require during their schooling progression, devise a mechanism that informs parents on how to monitor their children's practices and behaviour, educate parents on how to train their children on how to set and achieve appropriate career goals and how to choose school programmes that best fit the student's schooling interest. Students who enjoy such parental involvement have improved test scores, improved homework completion and they develop a positive attitude towards schoolwork (Epstein, 1995).

### **Decision-making**

For a school to run smoothly, it is of paramount importance to involve parents in the administration, governance and decision-making roles. Schools should engage parents in decision-making by including them through parent-teacher associations, school management committees and school patrons or chairperson. Students who enjoy such parental involvement have improved schooling and learning outcomes and enjoy enactment of some policies on their behalf which favour them (Epstein, 1995)

### **Collaborating with the community**

Since the schools and families are community-based, they benefit from the resources bestowed in that community while supporting their children's education. The community gatekeeper may be involved in any of the aforementioned involvements. The associated benefits to students include improved learning outcomes, exposure to more learning opportunities, tapping talents for those with extra-curricular potentials, applying the school knowledge with world realities, best choice in career options and ability to associate with other individuals apart from students, teachers and their parents (Epstein, 1995).

In this article, parenting and communication types of parental involvement are discussed. The measures of parenting contexts included preschool attendance, monitoring school attendance and checking students' progress records. These parenting contexts have been documented to have positive learning outcomes on the students. For example, a cross-sectional study done by Ngware et al. (2015) in two rural districts in Uganda indicated that grade six students who attended preschool for at least two years significantly outperformed their counterparts by 12 and 7 mean scores in literacy and numeracy, respectively. Additionally, many studies have shown that students with good school attendance rates have improved learning outcomes academic performance and transition to other grades (Ou & Reynolds, 2008; Ready, 2010).

The measures of communication type of parental involvement for this paper included sharing information on where the student stays after school, provision of basic learning materials, distance to school, parent having a meeting with the school when their children enter each grade, monitoring and discussing student academic performance with teachers, having clear information on school rules and policies and communication about programmes offered in the school. Students who enjoy such parental support have improved awareness of their own academic achievement, become more informed on education courses offered and understand the school's rules and regulations. These benefits are also complemented by the quasi-experimental study carried out by Abuya et al. (2014) in two urban slums in Kenya. The study found that students who enjoyed the parental component intervention had improved attendance rates, became more self-confident and had open communication with

their parents against their counterparts who did not enjoy parental component intervention.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was used for this study, with the aim of identifying and quantifying the effects of parental communication on the academic performances

### Population

The target population for the study was made up of 19800 form three students (that is all form three students) in 29 secondary schools in Buea Sub-Division. The schools involved 12 Public schools, 6 denominational schools and 11 Private schools. The accessible population was made up of form three (3) students; the sample was drawn from form three in six schools, (two from each of the public, denominational and lay private schools).

**Table 1: Distribution of Secondary Schools in Buea Sub-Division**

School Type	Number of Schools
Public	12
Denominational	06
Lay Private Schools	11
Total	29

**Table 2: Distribution of target population**

School Type	Schools	Male	Female	Total
Public	12	7.100	7.300	14.400
Denominational	06	1.084	1.016	2.100
Lay Private Schools	11	1.600	1.700	3.300
Total	29	9.784	10.016	19.800

**Table 3: Distribution of accessible population**

School Type	Number of School	Male	Female	Total
Public	2	54	56	110
Denominational	2	40	40	80
Lay Private Schools	2	55	55	110
Total	6	149	151	300

### Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample was made up of 300 form three secondary school students who were drawn from six selected schools. The following schools were selected for the study using the simple random sampling technique: Government High School Buea (G.H.S), Government Secondary School (G.S.S) Bokova, Baptist High School (B.H.S) Great Soppo Buea, Presbyterian Comprehensive High School (P.C.H.S) Buea, Inter-Comprehensive High School (I.C.H.S) Great Soppo and Cambridge College of Arts, Science and Technology (C.C.A.S.T) Buea. A stream each was taken from each of these schools taking into consideration the number of

form threes in these schools. This was done using the simple random sampling technique.

Form three was purposively selected for the study as it is a transitional class from lower to upper secondary. The survey research design was then carried out on all the 300 students since it was a sizable number that needed no further sampling. 55 were from GHS Buea, 55 from GSS Bokova, 40 each from BHS and PCHS and 55 each from Inter-Comprehensive High School Great Soppo and CCAST Buea respectively. This is represented in the table below just to enhance understanding. Out of the 300 respondent, 151 were females and 149 males.

**Table 4: Distribution of the Sample by School**

Name Of School	Number Of Students	Total
Government High School Buea	26	29
Government Secondary School Bokova	28	27
Baptist High School Great Soppo	20	20
Presbyterian Comprehensive High School Buea	20	20
Inter –Comprehensive College	26	29
Cambridge College of Arts & Technology	26	29
Total	149	151

## Instrumentation

Two methods of gathering information needed for this study were implored. These included a structured questionnaire for students. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher, scrutinized and approved by the research supervisor. The main objective of the questionnaire was to estimate the magnitude of parental involvement in their children's education and to determine the effect of the involvement on students' academic performance. Pupils' academic records were to supplement information gathered through the questionnaire.

## Questionnaire

The questionnaire had 100% and return rate. The questionnaire had two parts, the first of which was for gathering demographic data, while the second or the main part of the questionnaire consisted of questions in three dimensions of parental involvement. These dimensions of parental involvement included;

- 1) At home involvement-questions design to estimate the degree of parents contribution in such matters as homework assignments, assistance in reading and preparation for examination as well as parents' supervisions and monitoring of the children out of school activities.
- 2) Providing school needs-questions designed to estimate the level at which parents provide their children with necessary school needs like uniform, books, school fees and feeding.
- 3) Parent child interaction-questions designed to estimate the degree of communication between children and their parents about school or school related activities, including daily school experiences and future education and career plan.

These questions were 19 closed ended questions. There were to allow the responses to be coded (very often, often, sometimes, never) (strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, and disagree). This made the questionnaire easy and quick to complete taking into consideration the fact that the respondents were English speakers.

## Academic Achievement

Students' academic records relevant for this study were record of academic performance for one year for each student. Achievement scores for various subjects for the one were aggregated.

## Validity and Reliability of research instrument

The validity of an instrument refers to the extent to which the instrument measures what it was designed to measure (Gronland, 188). In this study the instrument was subjected to the face validity and content validity. Face validity refers to the practices of visually judging the measurement instrument for appropriateness rather than by statistic (Kerlinger, 1986). The questionnaire was constructed by the researcher with the guidance of the supervisor who is a psychologist in collaboration with an expert in Educational Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education. To establish the face validity as soon as the questionnaire was structured, it was submitted to the supervisor for scrutiny. The latter thoroughly read through all sections and deleted the irrelevances. Some adjustments were also made, for instance, how students' academic performance should be measured.

After making the necessary corrections, peers ascertained that the items were good enough to measure what they were designed to measure. The second phase was the pilot test which was the preliminary testing of the respondent's reaction to the questions. The instrument was trial tested on 50 students to three secondary schools within the area of the study. These schools were not used again in the main study, but were part of the target population. The students' responses gave a general impression of what was intended to be measured, revealing at the same time that there was no ambiguity of the items. This further assured the content validity of the instrument.

## Reliability

The data generated from the pilot test were analysed for reliability using the Conbach Coefficient Alpha method. The results showed that the reliability estimates for the sub-scales ranged from 0.73 to 0.90. These values were considered high enough to justify the instrument for use in research. The reliability measures are shown in table 3.5 below.

**Table 5: Conbach Co-efficient Alpha reliability estimates of the research instrument subscales (N=50)**

N <sup>o</sup>	Sub-Scale	N <sup>o</sup> Item	X	S.D	Reliability Estimates
1	Education level of parents	2	5.38	0.89	0.73
2	Parental academic assistance	6	15.18	2.53	0.79
3	Provision of school needs	6	17.48	2.70	0.90
4	Parents –child interaction	6	17.26	2.47	0.87
5	Students' academic performance		12.70	2.35	0.18

## FINDINGS

### Hypothesis Testing Review

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Parental communication with children does not significantly influence the academic performance of secondary school students in Buea Sub-Division.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** parental communication with children significantly influences the academic performances of secondary school students in Buea Sub-Division.

Independent variable in this hypothesis was parental communication with children while the dependent

variable was the academic performance of secondary school students in Buea Sub-Division the scores of the independent variable were got from the responses recorded from the six questionnaire items that measured the regular parental communication with children. The dependent, variable in the study was defined as the score obtained by the respondents on their terminal average during the third term examination of the 2017/2018 academic year. The statistical analysis technique used to test this hypothesis was the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 4.4.

**Table 6: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of parental communication on the academic performance**

Variable	$\Sigma X$	$\Sigma X^2$			
	$\Sigma Y$	$\Sigma Y^2$	$\Sigma XY$	$\Gamma_{xy}$	p-value
Parental communication with children	5115	10213	68157	0.14	0.071
Students' academic performance	3714	8237			
p* < 0.05; df = 298; critical r = 0.133					

The result of the analysis reveals that the calculated  $\Gamma_{xy}$  -value of 0.14 is greater than the critical  $\Gamma_{xy}$  -value of 0.133 at .05 level of significance with 298 degrees of freedom. With the result of the analysis, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis upheld. This result therefore means that the regular communication with children significantly influences the academic performance of secondary school students

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This article investigated the strength of the relationship between parental communication, an aspect of parental involvement and their children's academic performance. Out of the six types of parental involvement in the Epstein (1995) as highlighted in the earlier part of the article, this article was able to identify and adopt two of them (parenting and communication skills) from a larger study, which was discussed with respect to their influence on academic scores as the learning outcomes. The results obtained from this study have coincided with many other educational research studies investigating parental involvement and academic achievement for instance Murray et al. (2014). When families, schools and communities partner together towards supporting schooling of their children, they create a conducive environment for learning, strengthen parenting and communication skills, improve their children's academic achievement and the society develops improved social values and good citizenry.

Communication serves as the medium of information sharing between two or among many involved parties. In Epstein's (1995) parental

involvement framework, communication between the three overlapping spheres plays a fundamental role towards students achieving optimal learning outcomes. This study has revealed that consistent communication form of parental involvement, such as providing conducive environment at home, checking students' progress record and random visits to school, significantly increases students' numeracy and literacy scores. This finding is congruent to other education studies such as one done by Abuya et al. (2014) in Kenya which revealed that parental participation by engaging and creating an open communication with their teenage school going children significantly improved their learning outcomes. Teenage children became more aspired in education, developed open communication and were able to make critical decisions. Also, Henderson and Mapp (2002) found that effective communication among family, school and community was associated with improved student academic achievement, higher enrolment in education programmes perceived to be challenging, improved school attendance and improved social behaviour at home and school.

Despite the loud call for parental involvement in their children's education, it should be understood that the extent of parental involvement is very variable. This is attributed to the parent's myriad family responsibilities and commitments. For example, a parent who is in full-time employment may forfeit attending parent-school meetings for employment (office) duties. Epstein's (2001) framework of overlapping spheres categorised parental involvement barriers into family, school and community. Further research by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) adopted these overlapping spheres and classified

them into a four-model concept which includes societal factors, individual parent and family factors, child factors and the parent–teacher factors.

The present study revealed that regular parental communication with children significantly influences the academic performance of secondary school students thereby upholding the alternative hypothesis. According to the research finding, (72.16%) parents regularly communicate with their children. Communication is very important between the parent and the child. When children come back from school most parents find out what they studied in school and encourage them to work hard. Some parents even find out from their children what they will like to be in future. All these encourage the children to work harder.

These findings show that democratic parents are very interested in the education of their children. Being socializing agent's vis-à-vis their children, parent here try to keep channels of communication open to foster their children ability to regulate themselves. As they wish their children to do well in school, they create a conducive environment in which their children will come to understand why their parents value such goals; as Zimbardo et al (1996) tried to explain. By so doing parents contribute in keeping their children always at high levels of self-esteem, self-reliance and self-control as mentored by Chen, Z. (1994).

These findings are in line with the work of Serpell, R. (1994). who stated that children always strive for achievement when they communicate freely with their parents and are being encouraged. Through this communication parents become aware of their children's school needs and any other problems they have encouraged as far as leaning is concerned.

Epsin, as stated by Bronfenbrenner (1998), also supports these findings using his six types of parental involvement in children's education. One of these is effective communication that is parents talked with children about school-related issues and give them talks such as hard work is the key to success. Hoffman, M. and Satztein H.D. (1967). Also supported this fact by stating that parental involvement in their children's education appears to be enhanced by open, give and take communication such as family reading, praying together, writing and discussion. If this is encouraged it will create a forum for children to lay down their problems and ambitions to their parents. Honing also emphasized on the authoritative parenting style which encouraged effective communication between parents and their children. By so doing children will share their ideas and problems with their parents. All these show that effective and regular communication between parents and their children influences the academic performance of children.

On the other hand the findings revealed that children whose parents hardly communicate with them especially on school related matters do not really perform well as compared to those who communicate effectively with their parents. These findings found support with the empirical works of Grolinick and

Slowiczek (1994) who carried a research on communication and students' performance. They found out that the results of those children who scarcely see their parents nor communicate with them where below average while those who communicate with their parents all the time had an average of above 12. Therefore, effective communication should be encouraged between parents and the children.

From the above discussions it is clear that parental involvement has a significant motivating influence on the academic performance of secondary school student therefore it should be encouraged in one way or the other. Rogoff, B. (1990). in his theory of achievement motivation says students should be extrinsically and intrinsically motivated because when parents praise their children for anything well done, the tendency for these is to do better next time in order to earn more rewards.

### **Implications for Education and Contribution to Psychology**

According to Becker, W.C. (1964) children ought to be active participants in the teaching-learning transaction with the parents only being a knowledgeable guide as he presents problems, pose provocative question, probe and guide.

The issue about guidance and or Scaffolding is very important and ought to be incorporated in to today's education. This has its basis from the Russian Psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). Vygotsky's research emphasizes the critical importance of adults in guiding and supporting children's intellectual growth and learning processes, through such social guidance to be able to master step by step procedures in solving problems. Rogoff (1990) used the term guided participation to describe the mutual involvement between children and their social partners in collective activities.

Guided participation operates in three phases choosing and structuring activities to fit the skills and interest of children, supporting and monitoring children's participation in activities, and adjusting the level of support provided as children begin to perform the activities independently. The goal of guided participation should be to transfer responsibility for the task from the skilled partner to the unskilled.

Closely related to guided participation Vygotsky (1987) concept of scaffolding which referred to the process by which adults provide support to the child who is learning to master a task. When adults Scaffold, they direct those elements of the task that are beyond the child's ability. This suggests that if parents provide such guidance as prescribed, it would certainly be a great step towards reducing difficulties in learning. Also, Becker, W.C. (1964) stressed the need for achievement. They have found out that adolescents who have a strong need for achievement come from families where parents, set high performance standards, rewarded achievement and encouraged autonomy and independence. This training for achievement and independence generally

takes place in the context of warm parent-child relationship hence, democratic parenting. Becker, W.C. (1964) encouraged parents to adopt democratic parenting, so as to be interested in the education of their children.

Children also learn better when they are provided with their basic needs According to Coleman (1966) the economic status of parent determines their children's academic performances. Children from rich homes perform better in school because they always have their basic school needs and other physiological needs on time. It is difficult for a child to learn effectively without basic school needs like writing material, textbooks and late payment of fees. Therefore parents should always try to provide their children with their basic school needs on time so as to foster their learning and improve their academic performances in school.

According to Erickson as stated in Feldman (2000) children learn better when they are appreciated and encouraged. Therefore parents should always appreciate them in their effort in school and motivate them so as to become grate people in future. Serpell, R. (1994), emphasized on the authoritative parenting style which encourage effective communication between parents and their children. Therefore, in order to help these children perform better in school, effective communication between the two parties should be encouraged. From the findings of the study, it was revealed that African parents specifically Cameroonians parents always involve in the teaching-learning process of their children by providing them with their basic needs, giving them more schooling and interacting with them freely. All this helps to improve on the academic performance of their children. Psychologically, as children communicate freely with their parents, they develop love, affections and trust towards them thus, leading to emotional and social development of these children.

## CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

The results of this paper/study provide an overarching evidence to the concerned parties in the implementation of educational policies. The policy holders should reflect on their decisions and consider putting up mechanisms that can attract parents to participate in the education systems in Cameroon. Such mechanism would include rephrasing the educational policies in a clear and concise language, outline what school inputs the parent is supposed to contribute, create opportunities for parents to be involved in school activities and encourage active interaction with education stakeholders.

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