

PARENTS' COMMUNICATION STYLES AS QUINTESSENCE OF ADOLESCENTS' ACADEMIC  
ACHIEVEMENT IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLORS

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**Abstract**

*Academic Performance of students is of utmost importance to parents, educators, concerned Nigerians and the government. This, of course, is because of the huge impact education has on the national and economic development of the country. Education is an investment as well as an instrument that can be used to achieve rapid scientific, social, political, technological, cultural and economic development in the country. The influence of parents' communication styles is particularly in focus when assessing determinants of academic success in adolescent children. It was discovered from this study that family involvement especially their mode of communication in students' schooling is a positive and essential factor that contributes to their academic achievement. This paper therefore analyses concepts of parent's communication styles, adolescents, academic achievements and the counselling implications. The researchers relied on context analysis and used secondary data such as published and unpublished materials like text books, journals, newspapers and internet materials to gather and analyse the required data. Based on the findings, the researchers suggested among others that Professional counsellors should endeavour to assist the adolescents in various schools by organizing seminars that will expose the effects of their parents' communication styles within the school settings, Counsellors should ensure they educate and counsel parents on the need to communicate appropriately to the lives of their adolescents because it is during this crisis period (adolescence) that adolescents need them most.*

**Keywords:** *Communication styles, Academic achievement and Adolescents*

**Introduction**

Education is the process of developing or training an individual to cope with the challenges of living. According to Pinguart (2016), the introduction of this system of education led to the type of education that is planned and provided for classroom situation by trained teachers. It is however the family that builds the personality traits, social competence as well as psychological, emotional, physical and educational development of children. One of the primary foundation that serves as the basis for this development is the type of parents' communication style these parents adopts. Consequently, Chao (2001), Querido, Warner and Eyberg (2002) asserted that parents through their communication styles create a formidable basis towards the development and achievement of every aspect of the child's life. Low academic achievement tends to create many negative consequences for the children. Children with low academic performances may become more vulnerable to problems such as stress, hopelessness, delinquencies and substance abuse (Assarian, Biqam & Asqarnejad, 2006). The influence of parents' communication styles is particularly in focus when assessing determinants of academic success in adolescent children. The influence may be of significance from infancy through adulthood and can be appreciated across a range of ethnicities (Weis, Trommsdorff & Muñoz, 2016; Checa & Abundis-Gutierrez, 2017; Zhang, Hu, Ren, Huo & Wang, 2019). Previously, the authoritative parenting style has been most frequently associated with better academic performance among adolescent students, while purely restrictive and negligent styles have shown to have a negative influence on academic performance (Taiwo, 2011; Zhang et al., 2019; Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafiq & Berhanu, 2011). Parenting styles have also been linked to academic performance indirectly through regulation of emotion, self-expression and self-esteem (Checa, Abundis-Gutierrez, Pérez-Dueñas & Fernández-Parra, 2019).

Academic Performance of students is of utmost importance to parents, educators, concerned Nigerians and the government. This, of course, is because of the huge impact education has on the national and economic development of the country. Education is an investment as well as an instrument that can be used to achieve rapid scientific, social, political, technological, cultural and economic development in the country. Regrettably, however, the consensus of opinion all over the country is that Academic Performance of students in Nigeria is poor (Adebule, 2004). According to Adegoke (2008), achievement is a measure of quality and quantity of success one has in the mastery of knowledge, skills or understanding. Achievement could also involve accomplishing whatever task or goal one sets for himself or herself. It is the attainment of a standard of excellence (Umeano, 2010). Academic

achievement, specifically, has been described by O'Donnel, Reeve and Smith (2005), as the extent of an individual's level of knowledge in a given task in school. In this context, Academic achievement is the ability or level of success of the students in their academic work (which could either excellent or poor). Students should therefore put up personal efforts in order to achieve success or excellence in their academic works.

The poor Academic Performance of students has been seen as being a result of many factors. Some researchers have attributed students' poor achievement to parental factors. Family stress and financial problems are the major parental factors blamed by many researchers for the emotional development and poor Academic Performance of the students. According to Khalid, Qadir, Chan and Schwannauer (2018), students who had problems in school were often preoccupied with concerns outside the school setting. They further stressed that many lived in socially and economically disadvantaged home situations which significantly impede their emotional, social and economic growth and development. Poverty denies the students the opportunity of possessing such school materials as books that encourage high Academic Performance. The students' lack of the necessary time to read effectively, good food that enhance good mental development, proper dressing to boost their ego like other students are due to family stress which could be aggravated by poverty. At this point, one wonders whether there are some other particular parental factors that could influence these adolescents' evaluation of themselves as well as their Academic achievement. Could the styles of communication adopted by the parents be blamed for the level of self-esteem of these adolescents who are more or less striving to identify with their environment.

Academic performance is among the several components of academic success. Many factors, including socioeconomic status, students' temperament and motivation, peer, and parental support influence academic achievement. This study aims to investigate the determinants of academic achievement with emphasis on the role of parents' communication styles in adolescent students in Nigeria. This paper therefore highlights concepts of adolescents, concept of academic achievement, concepts of parents' communication styles as well as counselling implications.

### **Concept of Adolescent**

Adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood and this critical human developmental period is marked by several physical, psychological and social changes. Adolescents are a segment of the population with age range between 10-24 years. It is equally a period when a child feels grown up to become independent of choice and parental supervision (Akanni & Otakpor, 2016). An individual who undergoes this transition is known as an adolescent. Adolescents are faced with many challenges ranging from physical, social, psychological, emotional and educational problems. It is, however, pertinent to note that ability to sail through this phase without hindrances can lead to a meaningful adult life while mistakes of this phase can leave indelible marks in the life of the adolescent. Adolescence is a phenomenon that is distinctively human (Falaye, 2001); while many other living things pass through the normal growth stages of childhood to adulthood, only human beings manifest certain characteristics that fall in between childhood and adulthood. This period is here referred to as adolescence. It is an abnormal period of "dependency" when the individual is too old to be treated like a child, yet he is not able to take on the responsibilities of an adult. It is generally seen as the teenage years, a period between puberty and adulthood.

Lerner, Noh and Wilson (2005) described adolescence as a phase of life beginning in biology and ending in society. It is an "in between" developmental stage in which young people are no longer considered children, but are yet to be accepted as adults. Indeed, adolescence may be defined as the period within the life, when most of a person's biological, cognitive, psychological and social characteristics are varying into what typical is considered adult-like. For the adolescents, this period is a dramatic challenge, one requiring adjustment to changes in the self, in the family and in the peer group. In contemporary society, adolescents experience institutional changes as well. Among young adolescents, there is a change in school setting, typically involving an evolution from elementary school to either junior high school or middle school; and in late adolescence, there is transition from high school to the university, to the world of work or childrearing (Steinberg, 2002). Steinberg (2002) opined that the word "adolescence" is coined from the Latin verb "adolescere", meaning, "to grow into maturity". In line with this meaning, adolescence could then be perceived as a process rather than just a period of human development, a process of achieving the attitudes and believes needed for active participation in society. Adolescence may also be seen as a period of physical development, a chronological age span, a socio-cultural phenomenon and even as an abstract concept suggesting an idea or an attitude towards life.

Olayinka (2008) in his psychological description says that, the adolescent is a person of many facades. The writer further reflects that the adolescence period is not necessarily that of persistent stress, strain as emphasized by some writers. According to the researcher, some young people are helped to experience a gradual, relatively peaceful and successful continuous development from childhood to adulthood. However, this depends on their home background as well as other environmental factors. Socio-scientists who study adolescence, usually differentiate among early adolescence, which covers the period from about age 10 through age 13; middle adolescence from about age 14 through age 18; and late adolescence (or youth) from about age 19 through age 22 (Steinberg, 2002). Adolescence is described as a crisis period in life during which there is mixture of childhood and adulthood roles, drives, dependence and high expectations. An adolescent is variously referred to as a youth or teenager. Most secondary school students in Nigeria are usually within the adolescent age range of 10-25 years (Adegoke, 2003). Adolescence is a period of conflict with self, peer, parents and the society (Anderman, 2012).

### **Concept of Academic Achievement**

According to Khalid, Qadir, Chan and Schwannauer (2018), achievement is a measure of quality and quantity of success one has in the mastery of knowledge, skills or understanding. Achievement could also involve accomplishing whatever task or goal one sets for himself or herself. It is the attainment of a standard of excellence (Umeano, 2010). Academic achievement, specifically, has been described by O'Donnel, Reeve and Smith (2005), as the extent of an individual's level of knowledge acquired in a given task in school. In this context, Academic achievement is the ability or level of success accomplished by students in their academic pursuits (which could either be excellent or otherwise). Students should therefore endeavour to put in their best in order to achieve success or excellence in their academic career. Every year, many students choose to take some academic courses. Some of these students achieve little in class. According to Hill and Tyson (2009), these students may have the yearning to accomplish and the capability to realize the task, but sense the accomplishment has little or no value and feel doing it is not worth the effort or time. Others may fear that they are not skillful of completing the mandatory task, so they do not even begin. They feel it is healthier to receive a lower overall grade than to prove they do not have the aptitude to accurately complete the task. It is usually a non-conscious process in which a resolution on how to act or not to act is made (Strong & Suwana, 2001). These researchers therefore specified that achievement can often procure benefits and failure can often fetch shame. Nevertheless, it is only a small number of students who fall into these categories of minute accomplishment.

Educational anticipations, that is, students' own expectations about the highest level of education they will accomplish, denote a kind of prospect about forthcoming academic attainment. According to expectancy value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), anticipations of success are indispensable machineries prompting achievement-related performance and projected to be inclined by observations of competency and by goals held by individuals. Such observations and goals are prejudiced by individuals' understandings of their own preceding achievements. In other words, anticipations of success and consequences of achievements seemingly have a recurring effect on each other. That is, individuals' anticipations of success is susceptible to their achievements and their achievements are further vulnerable to their future prospects. Parents play important roles in the educational motivation of their children. They provide necessary facilities and educational environment which results in better performance in school. Parents approve and appreciate activities related to education and remove any difficulty felt by their wards. This type of behaviour of parents is known as parental support (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2003). In other words, parental support refers to the guidance, communication and interest shown by parents to promote their wards' progress in school. Students' progress is facilitated when parents give frequent verbal support and praise, regular feedback for school work and talk directly about school work and activities.

### **Parents' Communication Styles**

Communication is very vigorous in all areas of human life. It is used to influence; to impact relationships; to notify and to share, discover and uncover information. Thus, it is not amazing that communication and how to converse are so important to daily life that it has hatched an entire industry of books, articles and seminars explaining how to do it well (Oyinloye, 2006). Communication is a modest yet commanding word. It is a word that is understood by virtually everyone and still remains a mystery in its efficiency. Communication can be the making or flouting of all relationships. In this study, the four communication styles: aggressive, passive, passive-aggressive and assertive are described according to the ego states proposed in Eric Berne's Structural Analysis (Cacho, Kawi & Versoza, 2005). Aggressive Communication always encompasses manipulation. This is aimed to make people do what one wants by prompting culpability (hurt) or by using coercion and control tactics (anger). Covert or overt, the sender simply wants his/her needs met and right now. Although, there are a few areas where aggressive behaviour is called for

(i.e., sports or war), it may certainly not work in a parent-child relationship. As soon as communication is made up of put down statements that preclude other people from feeling good about themselves, this is an aggressive communication style characteristic of the serious parent ego state (Cacho, Kawi & Versoza, 2005). This type of communication is not moral between parents and the children. It will only raise destructive and oppressive adolescent individuals and this in essence will not have any bearing on the educational development of such individuals neither motivating their academic achievement.

Passive Communication is built on submission and expectations to dodge hostility at all costs. In this style, one ensures not to talk much, enquiry even less, and essentially do precise little. Such person does not want to shake the boat. Passives have educated that it is safer not to respond and healthier to withdraw than to stand up and be seen. The child ego state of an individual painstaking as the felt concept (Cacho, Kawi & Versoza, 2005), would likely display a more passive communication style. This type of parents' communication style results in over-dependence by children either at home or in the school. The chance of survival by such individual in academic success is very narrow. This is because it does not contribute positively to the academic achievement of the adolescents in their educational pursuit (Akinsola, 2011). Passive-Aggressive Communication is a mixture of styles that avoid direct hostility (passive), but endeavours to get even through manipulation (aggressive). If one has always believed about making somebody who needs to be "taught one thing or two" suffer, even just a minute bit, he/she has marched pretty near to, if not on/into, the deceitful and difficult world of the passive-aggressive. A passive-aggressive communication style would likely be shown by the fostering parent ego state (Checa et. al., 2019). Parents whose communication style is passive-aggressive have a tendency to be regularly protecting and attentive of their children and may make themselves a grasp to slim on. They can even make sacrifices at the expense of the self. The child may eventually become a spoilt child and find it difficult to outshine in life. This is because the ego shown by parents is not motivation but a fictitious ego (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2003).

Assertive communication style is the most effective and healthiest form of communication. According to Cacho, Kawi and Versoza (2005), assertive communication is how one logically articulates him/herself when his/herself-esteem is intact, giving one the confidence to communicate without games and manipulation. When one is being assertive, one works hard to generate mutually satisfying solutions. The individual communicates his/her needs plainly and forthrightly. Such individual cautions about the relationship and struggles for a win-win circumstance. He/she recognizes his/her limits and declines to be pressed outside them just because somebody else wants or needs something from him/her. Remarkably, assertive is the style many people use least. An adult ego state encourages a further assertive communication style. This is more characteristic of open families who lean towards advance and preserve a lifestyle that emphasizes negotiation, tolerance, teamwork as well as a willingness to hear each other out (Usman, 2019). Assertive communication style helps parents to build a sound and more convincing relationship with their children. With this, parents build a more realistic individual, build self-confidence and motivate an individual to accomplish realistic goals/successes.

Academic achievement is basically affected by the parents' communication styles. According to Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2000), parents whose style of communication is further assertive in nature will eventually have positive impact on the academic achievement of their children. Parents seem to be the principal influence on a child's motivation to learn (Strong & Suwana, 2001). Academic achievement is a vital determining factor of ambition, effort and doggedness when an individual anticipates that performance will be appraised in relation to some standard of excellence. Level of one's academic achievement pushes an individual to outshine, succeed or overtake others at several tasks (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2003). Parental involvement in children's well-being advances their academic performance and school behaviour. It upsurges academic inspiration and declines the number of dropouts (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). When parents are involved in their children's academic lives, children have a tendency to perform better academically than when their parents are not involved. At the secondary school level, students need supreme guidance, motivation and supervision to enhance their performance and to contest with their peers. Parental influence therefore has robust effects on the educational accomplishments of their children.

### **Counselling Implications**

The implication of this finding for counsellors in training is that counsellors need to be furnished with appropriate skills to guide and counsel parents on the suitable components of communication styles that could be employed to assist adolescent progress on their academic achievement. Parents' communication styles in students' educational achievement tallies with many paradigms of school such as commitment; which includes attendance at parent-teacher seminars, contributing to extracurricular activities, monitoring student performance, conveying parental



values, assisting in doing homework and providing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. On the other hand, it was famous that many schools have failed to involve parents wholly. For instance, numerous schools do not offer literature as a second language or interpreters at conferences/seminars for parents whose principal language is not English. Educational leaders need to embrace parents as vibrant stakeholders within the educational system and inspire teamwork and partnership.

It was discovered from this study that family involvement in students' schooling is a positive and essential factor that contributes to academic achievement. It was generally exposed from the study that, assertive communication style is viewed as more positive; hence, it is hypothesized that it will have more impact on the academic achievement of adolescents in Nigeria. The counsellors should therefore assist parents in developing more assertive ways of communicating with their children. It is assumed that a parent with an assertive communication style is likely to have an adolescent who would be motivated to achieve more both at school and outside the school environment. Majority of parents want the best for their children in terms of academic achievement, however, not all students attain such great academic success because some may not be rightly motivated at home. It is therefore questionable if parents may or may not affect their children's academic motivation or even the academic outcomes that they will achieve throughout their education. It is therefore become imperative for parents to motivate their children appropriately especially through their mode of communication while in school as this will serve as determinant of their future success. The manner in which parents communicate with their children could play an important role in the lives of these children. Communication enables parents and children to express their thoughts and feelings to one another.

### **Conclusion**

In the light of the findings in this paper, it is plausible to assume that the communication styles parents apply in bringing up their children could play an essential part in cultivating individuals' behavioural outcomes, which reflect the unique ways they think, feel, behave and reflected in their academic achievement. From the above study, one can deduce also that assertive communication style used by parents in order to motivate their children towards education nowadays was high due to the level of awareness as well as enlightenment on the part of parents. Every parent irrespective of their level of education, socialization, socioeconomic status wishes their children attend school and become responsible members of society.

### **Suggestions**

- i. Based on this premise, parents are enjoined to continue in partaking in the education of their children through their appropriate use of assertive communication style in the lives of the adolescent individuals especially from the elementary school up till tertiary institutions.
- ii. To determine all the influencing factors enhancing academic achievement of students in a single attempt is a complex and difficult task. Professional counsellors should endeavour to assist the adolescents in various schools by organizing seminars that will expose the effects of their parents' communication styles within the school settings.
- iii. Seminars and workshops should be organized by Counsellors for parents as well through the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) forum. This will boost the parents' opportunity to be enlightened on the need to adopt the necessary conversation and orientation on positive parents' communication styles which will hitherto predict creative, self-confident, independent and self-propelled adolescent students.
- iv. Counsellors should ensure they educate and counsel parents on the need to communicate appropriately to the lives of their adolescents because it is during this crisis period (adolescence) that adolescents need them most.

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