

**EXPLORING THE ROLE OF PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOL COUNSELING
PROGRAMS: IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL
ADJUSTMENT IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

Parental engagement is increasingly recognised as an important condition for effective school counselling because students move continuously between home and school, and difficulties in either setting can affect academic and social adjustment. This conceptual thematic study examines the role of parental engagement in school counselling programmes and its implications for secondary-school students in South-South Nigeria. The study synthesises contemporary Nigerian research, recent international meta-analyses and established scholarship on family-school partnerships. It distinguishes parental engagement from mere parental presence by emphasising purposeful communication, shared problem-solving, educational expectations, responsive monitoring, participation in counselling decisions and support for agreed interventions. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of the parental involvement process provides the main theoretical framework, while Epstein's family-school-community partnership perspective supports the analysis of practical engagement forms. The conceptual results identify six interrelated pathways through which parental engagement can strengthen counselling outcomes: early identification of student needs; continuity between home and school interventions; academic socialisation and learning support; social-emotional support and behaviour regulation; career and educational decision support; and improved referral, monitoring and follow-up. The analysis also shows that parental engagement can become counterproductive when it takes the form of intrusive homework control, public confrontation of teachers, excessive decision-making for adolescents or breaches of counselling confidentiality. Evidence from Rivers, Delta, Cross River, Akwa Ibom and Edo States indicates that parental support, family conditions, guidance services and school-family communication are associated with academic performance, adjustment, discipline and career development. The study concludes that school counsellors should treat parents as structured partners while preserving student dignity, developmental independence and professional confidentiality.

Keywords: parental engagement; school counselling; academic adjustment; social adjustment; family-school partnership; South-South Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

Secondary-school students negotiate academic demands, peer relationships, identity development and family expectations at the same time. Parents influence study routines, aspirations, emotional regulation, attendance and responses to failure, while counsellors help students develop coping, decision-making and interpersonal skills. When home and school operate without meaningful communication, students can receive conflicting expectations. Parental engagement in school counselling therefore connects two major environments that shape adolescent development.

The research literature broadly supports this connection. Barger et al. (2019), in a meta-analysis involving 448 independent studies and more than 480,000 families, reported positive associations between parental involvement and academic, social and emotional adjustment. Their analysis also showed an important qualification: parental homework assistance was not uniformly beneficial and was negatively associated with achievement in the pooled evidence. Boonk et al. (2018) similarly concluded that parental expectations and educational aspirations show more consistent positive associations with academic achievement than several forms of direct control. These findings caution against treating all parental activity as equally helpful. Productive engagement is better understood as developmentally appropriate support that strengthens students' competence, motivation and connection to school.

Recent evidence strengthens the argument. Yang et al. (2024) found that secure parent-child attachment was positively associated with academic achievement, motivation and engagement. Martinez-Yarza et al. (2024) reported that family involvement could contribute to social-emotional development through school engagement. Ma et al. (2024) further show that parents' confidence in helping their children is related to home-school partnership. Counselling programmes should therefore consider whether parents feel capable of helping and whether school invitations support constructive participation.

Nigerian evidence gives the issue local relevance. Angwaomaodoko (2024) reports positive academic implications of parental involvement in Delta State, while Nwanwukwu and Asiyai (2024) link parental education and socioeconomic status with achievement. In Rivers State, Aderiye and Adedayo (2025) found that parental assistance and educational background contributed to test scores and identified time constraint as a major barrier. Thus, engagement occurs under material conditions, and visible school attendance cannot be treated as the only sign of parental commitment.

Social adjustment also requires attention. Egbule and Odojin (2024) associate parenting conditions with social adjustment, while Amalu et al. (2024) link need satisfaction with social adjustment in Cross River State. However, Ndifon Bekomson et al. (2023) show that parental interference and public confrontation of teachers can complicate discipline.

Engagement should therefore mean coordinated support guided by clear roles and respectful communication, not unrestricted intervention in school decisions.

School counselling provides a suitable structure for this coordination. Walker et al. (2010) argue that counsellors can strengthen parental participation through respectful invitations and guidance on productive support, while Griffin and Steen (2010) apply Epstein's family-school-community framework directly to counsellor practice. Recent South-South evidence also associates guidance services with academic adjustment in Akwa Ibom State (Johnny et al., 2026) and counselling services with academic performance in Delta State (Egbule, 2023).

This study therefore examines parental engagement as part of the design and delivery of school counselling, not simply as a background family variable. It asks how counsellors can invite parents into appropriate aspects of counselling, how engagement can support academic and social adjustment, and how schools can prevent parental participation from becoming intrusive or controlling. The South-South Nigerian context is used because studies from Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers States provide growing evidence on family influences, guidance services, adjustment and achievement, but these strands have rarely been brought together into a counselling-centred conceptual framework.

Statement of the Problem

School counselling aims to help students manage academic, personal-social and career concerns, but counsellors often work with problems whose causes and consequences extend into the family. Persistent lateness, declining performance, examination anxiety, conflict with peers, truancy, poor study routines, career indecision and behavioural difficulties may all be influenced by communication patterns, parental expectations, family resources or home stress. When counsellors receive little information from parents, they may understand only the school-facing part of the problem. Conversely, when parents do not understand counselling goals, they may undermine agreed interventions by using inconsistent discipline, unrealistic academic pressure or contradictory advice.

The problem is not solved merely by increasing the frequency of parent attendance. Research distinguishes supportive engagement from intrusive involvement. Barger et al. (2019) found that parental involvement is generally beneficial, but direct homework assistance can be negatively related to achievement. Xu et al. (2023) similarly found that supportive homework involvement was positively associated with mathematics achievement, while intrusive involvement was negatively associated. In Cross River State, Ndifon Bekomson et al. (2023) reported forms of parental involvement that could contribute to school indiscipline. These findings reveal a practical dilemma for counsellors:

they need parental partnership, but the partnership must support adolescent growth instead of replacing student responsibility or professional judgement.

A further problem concerns inequality of access. Parents who work long hours, live far from school, have limited formal education or feel unwelcome in school may participate less visibly even when they care deeply about their children's progress. Aderiye and Adedayo (2025) identified time constraint as an important barrier in Rivers State. If schools define engagement only as physical attendance at PTA meetings, they may label disadvantaged families as uninterested and fail to develop alternative forms of communication. The present study addresses this problem by conceptualising parental engagement as a structured, flexible and counselling-guided partnership directed at students' academic and social adjustment.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to examine:

- i. Parental engagement in the context of school counselling.
- ii. How parental engagement relates to students' academic adjustment.
- iii. How parental engagement relates to students' social adjustment.
- iv. Which forms of parental participation are most compatible with effective school counselling.
- V. What counselling structures can strengthen parental engagement while protecting students' developmental independence and confidentiality.

Research Questions

The study is guided by five questions.

1. What does parental engagement mean in the context of school counselling?
2. How does parental engagement relate to students' academic adjustment?
3. How does parental engagement relate to students' social adjustment?
4. Which forms of parental participation are most compatible with effective school counselling?
5. What counselling structures can strengthen parental engagement while protecting students' developmental independence and confidentiality?

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental Engagement

Parental engagement refers to purposeful parental participation in processes that support a child's learning, adjustment and development. The term overlaps with parental involvement, but engagement conveys a more relational and reciprocal idea. Involvement can describe attendance, monitoring or the performance of school-requested tasks, while engagement suggests shared understanding, communication and collaboration. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) explain parental participation through parents' role construction, their sense of efficacy and the invitations they perceive from children and schools. Walker et al. (2005) later refined this model and emphasised the interaction of parental motivation, invitations and life-context variables. This definition is useful for counselling because it explains why parents who value education may still participate differently.

Epstein (2010) conceptualises family-school-community partnership through parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaboration with the community. These forms do not carry equal relevance in every counselling case, but they show that partnership extends beyond school visits. A parent may support counselling by discussing educational expectations at home, observing changes in behaviour, attending a case conference, reinforcing a study plan, consenting to referral or communicating information about stressors affecting the student. Accordingly, engagement in this study means developmentally appropriate parental participation in counselling-related processes that support the student without displacing the student's own responsibilities.

School Counselling Programmes

A school counselling programme is an organised set of services supporting students' educational, career, personal and social development through counselling, orientation, information, appraisal, referral, consultation and preventive activities. Johnny et al. (2026) report positive relationships between guidance services and academic adjustment in Akwa Ibom State, while Egbule (2023) links counselling services with academic performance in Delta State. Consultation is especially relevant to parental engagement because counsellors may work directly with students while helping parents support agreed goals at home.

Academic Adjustment

Academic adjustment refers to the processes through which students respond successfully to the demands of schooling. It includes engagement, motivation, study behaviour, persistence, self-efficacy, attendance and achievement. Yang et al. (2024) describe academic adjustment in terms of achievement, motivation and engagement, while Cai and Tu (2021) show that parental academic socialisation and schoolwork assistance can shape performance during educational transition. In South-South Nigeria, Johnny et al. (2026)

directly connect guidance services with academic adjustment in Akwa Ibom State. Academic adjustment therefore concerns how effectively a student participates in learning and responds to academic expectations, not examination scores alone.

Social Adjustment

Social adjustment refers to students' capacity to interact constructively with peers and adults, comply with reasonable social expectations, regulate behaviour, resolve conflict and maintain a sense of belonging. Egbule and Odofin (2024) treat social adjustment as an outcome influenced by parenting style and parental education, while Amalu et al. (2024) show that satisfaction of students' needs is related to social adjustment in Cross River State. Barger et al. (2019) found that parental involvement was positively associated with social and emotional adjustment and negatively associated with delinquency. Social adjustment is therefore closely connected to the quality of relationships that surround the student at home and at school.

Thematic Review

The first theme is parental communication and academic socialisation. Boonk et al. (2018) identify expectations and aspirations among the forms of involvement most consistently associated with achievement. Angwaomaodoko (2024) reports similar academic implications in Delta State, and Akindipe (2025) found that structured home support and school-home communication improved mathematics achievement in a Nigerian intervention. Counsellors can therefore help parents replace general pressure for "good results" with realistic goals, encouragement and manageable study routines.

The second theme concerns support versus control. Xu et al. (2023) found a positive association between supportive parental homework involvement and mathematics achievement but a negative association for intrusive involvement, with the adverse association especially marked at higher grade levels. Barger et al. (2019) likewise found that homework assistance differed from other forms of involvement. This distinction is important during adolescence because excessive monitoring can communicate distrust or limit self-regulation. Counselling should therefore help parents provide structure and encouragement while gradually allowing students to manage their own study responsibilities.

The third theme is social-emotional adjustment. Sheridan et al. (2019) found positive effects of family-school interventions on social-behavioural competence, while Martinez-Yarza et al. (2024) show that school engagement can mediate links between family involvement and social-emotional development. South-South evidence similarly connects parenting and school counselling with adjustment (Egbule & Odofin, 2024; Nkanu et al., 2026). Counsellors therefore need family information when social difficulties persist, but family contact should support problem-solving instead of blame.

The fourth theme is school invitations and parental access. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) argue that participation depends partly on invitations from schools and children, while Walker et al. (2005) show that life context also matters. Aderiye and Adedayo (2025) identify limited time as a barrier in Rivers State. Schools should therefore supplement daytime meetings with telephone consultations, secure messaging or scheduled parent clinics when confidentiality can be protected.

The fifth theme concerns discipline and boundaries. Ndifon Bekomson et al. (2023) found that parental interference and open confrontation of teachers could contribute to school indiscipline in Calabar South. Parents require legitimate routes to question school decisions, but counsellors should mediate disagreements through respectful case conferences and student-centred problem-solving. Productive engagement allows disagreement without humiliating students or undermining support.

The sixth theme is career and educational decision-making. Parental participation can provide information, resources and encouragement, but adolescent choice must remain visible. Imhabekhai (2025) found parental involvement to be a significant predictor of career decision-making among senior secondary students in Edo State. Career counselling should therefore include parents when educational finance, family expectations or occupational values influence decisions, while ensuring that parents do not determine careers solely according to prestige or family preference. The counsellor's task is to help the student integrate interests, abilities, opportunities and family realities into an informed decision.

Theoretical Framework

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of the parental involvement process provides the main theoretical framework for this study. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) proposed that parents become involved because they construct a parental role that includes educational participation, believe that they can influence their child's success, and perceive invitations or demands for involvement. Their later review (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) further explained how these motivational beliefs interact with parents' skills, time and energy. Walker et al. (2005) refined the model by clarifying the roles of motivational beliefs, invitations and life context.

The model is particularly suitable for school counselling because it shifts attention from blaming parents for "low involvement" to asking why participation varies. A parent may not attend school because work schedules, transport, previous negative experiences or low confidence make participation difficult. Another parent may be highly active but engage through control instead of support. The counsellor can intervene by issuing specific invitations, explaining counselling goals, identifying forms of participation that match the parent's resources, and strengthening parental confidence. Walker et al. (2010) explicitly

apply this reasoning to school counselling and argue that counsellors can educate both teachers and parents about productive invitations and forms of involvement.

The model also explains how parental participation can influence outcomes through modelling, reinforcement, instruction and encouragement. In counselling, these mechanisms can reinforce study routines, respectful communication and help-seeking. Epstein's partnership framework adds a practical lens by organising communication, parenting support, learning at home, decision-making and community collaboration (Epstein, 2010; Griffin & Steen, 2010). Thus, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler explain engagement processes, while Epstein helps organise counselling practice.

3 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a conceptual thematic review design. It did not collect primary data or calculate pooled effect sizes. The purpose was to integrate empirical findings, meta-analytic evidence and theoretical scholarship into a counselling-centred account of parental engagement and student adjustment in South-South Nigeria. Sources were identified through targeted searches of scholarly databases, journal platforms and DOI records using combinations of parental engagement, parental involvement, school counselling, academic adjustment, social adjustment, secondary school, family-school partnership, Rivers State, Delta State, Cross River State, Akwa Ibom State, Edo State, Bayelsa State and Nigeria.

Priority was given to recent studies published from 2023 to August 2026 that addressed South-South Nigeria, together with contemporary meta-analyses and established theoretical sources. Older works were included when they supplied foundational definitions or directly connected parental involvement theory with school counselling. The analysis compared definitions, reported relationships and practical implications, then organised recurrent ideas into themes covering academic socialisation, social-emotional support, school invitations, boundaries, career decisions and continuity of counselling. Because this is a conceptual review, the results represent an evidence-informed synthesis and require empirical testing across different South-South school contexts.

4. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Parental Engagement as an Early Identification Resource

The first conceptual result is that parents can improve the timeliness and accuracy of counselling assessment. Parents observe routines, family stress and behaviour outside school, while counsellors and teachers observe attendance, performance and peer interaction. Combining these perspectives can improve assessment, provided parental

accounts remain one source of information and adolescents are heard directly. Schools should therefore maintain clear parent-referral and counsellor-consultation procedures.

Parental Engagement as Continuity between Counselling and Home

The second result is that parental engagement can extend counselling gains beyond the counselling office. Study plans, attendance goals or coping strategies are more likely to continue when parents understand and reinforce them. Akindipe (2025) demonstrates benefits from structured home support, while Walker et al. (2010) explain how modelling, reinforcement and encouragement operate. Counsellors should translate goals into realistic home practices and reduce monitoring as students develop competence.

Academic Socialisation and Adjustment

The third result is that parental expectations are most useful when expressed through encouragement, planning and interest instead of threat or comparison. Meta-analytic evidence supports expectations and academic socialisation (Boonk et al., 2018; Barger et al., 2019), while Rivers and Delta studies connect parental participation and family conditions with performance (Aderiye & Adedayo, 2025; Nwanwukwu & Asiyai, 2024). Counsellors can help families set achievable goals and use low-cost supports such as protected study time and regular discussion.

Social Adjustment, Belonging and Behaviour

The fourth result concerns social adjustment. Family-school interventions can improve social-behavioural functioning (Sheridan et al., 2019), and South-South studies link parenting, need satisfaction and behavioural conditions with adjustment (Amalu et al., 2024; Egbule & Odofin, 2024; Nkanu et al., 2026). Joint meetings can identify triggers and coordinate responses, but confidentiality requires that only information necessary for support, safety and agreed intervention be shared.

Career and Educational Decision Partnership

The fifth result is that parental engagement can strengthen career counselling when it provides contextual information and practical support without determining the student's choice. Imhabekhai (2025) found a strong predictive influence of parental involvement on career decision-making among Edo State secondary students. The counsellor can therefore include parents in career information sessions, financing discussions and education planning while holding separate student counselling where necessary. A balanced process acknowledges family realities but also protects the student's interests, abilities and developing independence.

Referral, Monitoring and Follow-Up

The sixth result is that parents are important to referral and follow-up when a student requires services beyond the school. Parents often control transport, payment, consent and continued attendance at external services. Engagement can therefore determine whether

referrals are completed. The counsellor should explain why referral is recommended, provide practical information and agree on the educational support needed after referral. Where family circumstances create barriers, the counsellor can connect parents with community resources. Epstein's community-collaboration dimension is relevant here because effective support sometimes depends on partnerships beyond the family and school.

A Counselling Framework for Productive Parental Engagement

The synthesis produces a six-part framework. First, schools create respectful and flexible invitations to parents, including alternatives to daytime physical meetings. Second, counsellors clarify roles and confidentiality before sharing case information. Third, assessment integrates student, parent and school perspectives while maintaining the student's voice. Fourth, counsellor-parent planning identifies a small number of practical home and school actions linked to academic or social goals. Fifth, the student remains an active participant and gradually assumes greater responsibility as competence develops. Sixth, progress is reviewed and parental monitoring is adjusted instead of becoming permanent surveillance. The framework treats engagement as a process of partnership, not a measure of how often parents appear in school.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

The conceptual findings show that parental engagement can strengthen school counselling because families and schools hold complementary knowledge about students. This conclusion agrees with the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model and with evidence linking involvement to academic, social and emotional adjustment (Barger et al., 2019). Parent work should therefore be planned within counselling programmes instead of appearing only during serious difficulty.

The analysis also demonstrates that the quality of engagement matters more than simple intensity. Supportive monitoring, educational expectations, communication and encouragement can contribute to adjustment, whereas intrusive homework control or confrontational involvement can undermine the student-school relationship. Xu et al. (2023) and Barger et al. (2019) provide strong evidence for this distinction, and the Cross River findings reported by Ndifon Bekomson et al. (2023) show its local relevance. Counsellors should therefore help parents distinguish support from control, particularly during adolescence when students need increasing responsibility.

South-South evidence suggests that counselling and family engagement should be analysed together. Guidance services relate positively to academic adjustment in Akwa Ibom State (Johnny et al., 2026), while Rivers and Delta studies document parental contributions to academic outcomes (Aderiye & Adedayo, 2025; Angwaomaodoko, 2024). Cross River and

Delta studies extend the discussion to social adjustment. These findings support coordinated family-school influence without implying that one model will fit every school.

Equity is another important finding. Visible school attendance is not a reliable measure of parental concern because employment, distance, education and prior relationships with schools affect participation. The theoretical model predicts such life-context effects, and Rivers State evidence identifies time as a practical barrier (Aderiye & Adedayo, 2025). Counselling programmes should therefore provide multiple participation routes. Flexible invitations can widen engagement without lowering professional standards.

Finally, the student must remain central. Parental engagement should strengthen, not replace, adolescent participation. Counsellors should explain when parents will be involved, what information may be shared and how students can contribute to decisions. This is consistent with evidence that family involvement can operate through school engagement (Martinez-Yarza et al., 2024).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Parental engagement has substantial relevance to school counselling programmes because students' academic and social adjustment develops through interaction between home and school. Contemporary meta-analytic research associates parental involvement with achievement, engagement, motivation, social adjustment and emotional adjustment, while South-South Nigerian studies connect family factors and counselling services with student outcomes. However, the evidence also shows that parental participation is not automatically beneficial. Intrusive control, conflict with school personnel and excessive decision-making can weaken adjustment.

A productive counselling approach therefore combines respectful invitations, flexible communication, clear boundaries, student participation, realistic home support and regular review. School counsellors are well positioned to organise this partnership because their work crosses academic, personal-social and career domains. Parental engagement should consequently be treated as a structured counselling resource whose purpose is to strengthen student competence, belonging and educational progress while preserving confidentiality and adolescent development.

5.2 Recommendations

Secondary schools in South-South Nigeria should include parental engagement procedures in their counselling programme plans instead of depending on informal contact. Counsellors should establish regular parent consultation periods, confidential referral channels and flexible meeting options for parents who cannot attend during school hours. School leaders should ensure that counsellors have private spaces and communication resources for family consultation.

Counsellors should provide parent education on supportive academic socialisation, realistic expectations, adolescent communication, social adjustment and career decision support. Training should clearly distinguish supervision from intrusive control. Parents should be encouraged to reinforce agreed routines and monitor progress without completing work for students or publicly confronting teachers. Career programmes should include parents in information and financing discussions while preserving students' interests and choices.

Schools should develop protocols for confidentiality and information sharing. Students should know the circumstances in which parents will be contacted, while parents should understand that counselling requires a degree of privacy. Joint case meetings should focus on specific goals, responsibilities and review dates. Education authorities should also strengthen professional counselling staffing and provide continuing development in family-school consultation. Future research should test parental-engagement counselling models across urban, rural, public and private schools in the six South-South states and should compare academic, social and help-seeking outcomes over time.

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