



Parental role in children's school and learning activities in Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the role of parents in school and learning activities of their children. Private schools in Port Harcourt metropolis, affordable to low and middle-income earners were purposively selected; among these private schools, two were randomly selected for the study. Twenty (20) parents were purposively selected, considering the performance of their children for the study. A 16-item Questionnaire For Parents (QFP) and a 10-item Interview For Parents (IFP) were the instruments used for collection of data. The Pearson product moment correlation was used to determine the reliability of the QFP. The r-value was 0.98 which indicates that the instrument was reliable. Three (3) research questions were designed for the study. Descriptive statistic such as means and percentage were used to analyse data from the questionnaire. Findings from the study suggest that the socio-economic status of parents affected their involvement with the school of their children and that parents of higher status showed more involvement than those of lower status. The results also suggest that parents' interaction with the school of their parents by performance groups did not show any clear difference. On the outcome that socio-economic status affected their involvement with the school of their children, it is recommended that government reduce the wide economic gap in families by policies that encourage the poor to have access to social services that would enable them to proudly relate with the school of their children. The implications of the results and suggestions for further studies were made.

Keywords: Parental role, socio-economic status, school involvement, school achievement.

Introduction

The study was carried out in two primary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. Port Harcourt city is also the capital of Rivers State in Nigeria, it is a metropolis as well as a cosmopolitan city, with a population of about 1.5 million people, (Kio-Lawson & Dekor, 2014). Port Harcourt enjoys both federal and state government infrastructures such as roads, water, electricity supply, housing, industries, hospitals, schools- primary, secondary, and tertiary. This study focuses on parental involvement in their children's schools and learning activities in primary schools. Primary school is the foundation for every academic pursuit, so it is important for all involved to work together for progress of the children in their school attainment.

Nigeria has been going through political and economic difficulties at least, for the past three decades. The country is also the most populous in Africa with an estimated population of 214 million out of which about 45% are children and youths under 15 years (CIA World Factbook, July 2020). The desire for parents to provide for and meet the physical and social needs of their children has driven both parents in most cases to engage in employed and entrepreneurial activities with less time for their children, both at home and for school-related activities. Therefore, the educational implication of parents' work and other related activities on the attainment of their children in school is the focus of this study and will be examined and discussed in this research.

The research "Parental role in children school and learning activities in Port Harcourt, Nigeria" is carried out to investigate how parents' involvement in their children's school and learning contributes to their children's academic attainment and progress in schools. Parental role here includes their participation in school activities such as Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, one-on-one meetings with class and head teachers, assisting children with school work at home and having forums for discussion with children on academic and social progress. Parental involvement is the attitude of parents towards, and commitment in active participation of their children's school activities and progress to improve pupil's achievement in their academic attainment (LaBahn, 1995). Parental involvement is also referring to the time parents spent in playing roles in their children live and school activities to see the best been achieved by their children in school and social life (Ireland, 2014). Parental involvement according to Catsambis (2001), Englund, Luckner, Whaley, and Egeland, 2004 as cited by Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal(2010), is the attitudes and values upheld by parents concerning their children education and aspirations in life. They suggested that values and attitudes may not be direct elements of child academic performance, but may improve school attainment indirectly in promoting children's motivations and determination in challenging educational tasks.

In the context of this study, parental involvement is considered as the role parents play in helping their children achieve the best in their academic attainment and school progress, or as values parents hold in their children schooling and their attitudes towards assisting the children in achieving their goals either positively or negatively depending on their understanding and involvement. If parents are involved in children's school and learning activities, they will be able to understand the importance of helping their children in attaining higher school performance by providing working

materials for them, helping with homework, having regular visits to children's school and having good relationships with teachers and the school in attending PTA meetings and other school activities. If parents understand the value of their children academic pursuit, they will have positive attitudes in being involved.

There have been some misconceptions about the term parental involvement among teachers and parents. According to Baker and Stevenson, 1986, and Lareau, 1987 and 1994 in their studies Mothers' strategies for children's school achievement, and Social differences in family-school relationships identified some misunderstanding in the term involvement between parents and teachers or the school. Whereas some parents said they are involved in their children school as far as they can provide food, shelter, and education for them, they have played their roles. On the other hand, teachers and the school see the attitudes of such parents as not supportive to their children in terms of helping them perform higher in their school attainment, because supporting children in education is beyond providing their necessary needs, but putting in extra time and energy to their children in achieving what they desire, hence the gap and that is the purpose of this study, to find out how this gap can be closed.

Some studies have highlighted the importance of parental involvement in the school and home learning activities of their children (Loucks, 1992; Hara & Burke, 1998; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). For instance, Hara and Burke (1998) in their study, parent involvement: the key to improved student achievement in Chicago inner-city elementary school, reported that parental involvement in the learning activities of their children improved their children's academic achievement and attitude towards learning. Similarly, Loucks (1992) reported that the participation of parents and other older adults in supporting the school and learning activities of children in homes not only improve academic attainment of the children but also, sustained the progress made by those children. Sheldon and Epstein (2005) investigated the effects of family and community partnerships with schools and pupils' mathematics achievement in primary and secondary schools and found that there were associations between pupils' scores in mathematics with practices that stimulated families to support their children at home with mathematics. Considering the importance and effectiveness of parental involvement in the education of their children, it is important that educators and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers enrich the content of their teacher training curriculum to equip trainee teachers with skills and knowledge that would foster family and community participation in schools for effective learning and development of school children. In this regard, Epstein (2013) argued that everyone knows that pupils' academic achievement gets enhanced by community and family involvement in their school activities and advocated that "educators also must learn how to implement research-based practices that will engage their own students' families in ways that contribute to student learning and development" (p.115). It is important to understand what parental involvement implies and in the context of this study. Many researchers according to Sheldon and Epstein (2005), describe parental involvement as a variety of activities and links among families, communities, and schools. Epstein (1995) outlined six types of parental involvement in school, community, and family partnerships:

"Type 1. Parenting: Helping all families establish supportive home environments for children

Type 2. Communicating: Establishing two-way exchanges about school programs and children's progress

Type 3. Volunteering: Recruiting and organizing parent help at school, home, or other locations

Type 4. Learning at home: Providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related materials

Type 5. Decision making: Having parents from all back grounds serve as representatives and leaders on school committees

Type 6. Collaborating with the community: Identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs" (p.197).

Although these six types of parental involvement describe an elaborate productive family, community and school partnership links and activities that have proved to positively influence pupil academic attainment and development, Type 4 that borders on 'Learning at home' is the key focus of the present study.

My interest in research on parental role in their children's school and learning activities in Nigeria developed as I observed the poor performance of children in all grade levels of learning among children in schools. As a classroom teacher for several years in nursery, primary and secondary education in Nigeria, I have had experiences with children whose parents were interested in assisting and participate maximally in the progress of their children academic attainment and how this enhanced the performance of their children in school. On the other hand, I have also encountered children whose parents neglect their roles in supporting their children in school-related learning activities and how that affected the children negatively, both in their school performance and relationships with their parents at home. In my opinion, as a parent and a teacher, I would suggest that it is important for the school and parents to create relationships that will enhance good support in the high performance of their children in their academic attainment, and school progress. If a teacher observes that a child in the classroom is always failing in all subjects, there could be the tendency that child needs special attention. There could be other factors like: emotional trauma, psychological problems, or if the child is having learning difficulties, which may be responsible for the poor performance of the child, either in school or at home. This can be possible, if the parents are well informed and willing to discuss and assist the teacher or school on how to help and bring out the best in their children school progress. For example, there was a boy I taught in primary 6, who was not performing well in most of his subjects, even though this child looks bright and intelligent, he was not completing his homework and his behaviour at school was also poor. So, the parents were invited for a meeting, to discuss how we can help the child to improve in his school progress. During the meeting, I discovered that there were some family problems at home which were affecting the child, such as the father been sick for a long time and the mother was left alone to fend for the family, and so little attention was given to the child at home to meet his academic needs, because they did not understand their child well, were surprised to hear his behaviours at school.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be answered to obtain the findings of the study.

1. Does the socio-economic status of parents affect their involvement with their children's schooling?
2. To what extent do parents relate with teachers and school of their children?

3. What level of academic support do parents give to their children at home?

Parents' socioeconomic status and interest in children's schooling

Dauber and Epstein (1989) in their study, parent attitudes and practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools, explored how parents in economically disadvantaged communities say they are involved or that they want to be involved and, how parental involvement compares in elementary and middle grade schools. This paper is considered important as my study would be conducted in Nigeria where most parents on the average are considered economically disadvantaged. Data were collected with parent involvement at home and school questionnaire from 2300 parents of inner-city elementary and middle schools. The result shows that parent involvement is important for children's learning, desires about schools and aspirations. Educational progress is observed in children at all grade levels if parents are involved in their children's school and learning activities, at home and school, whatever the educational background or social class of their parents. Recent research have shown that involving parents in schools' programs and meeting with class teachers at school have a significant positive effect on parents willingness and abilities to help their children across all grade levels of children in school, parents are able to rate teachers' skills and teaching qualities, they are able to understand teachers' opinions about parents' abilities to help their children on school work at home, and children's attitudes about school, homework, and comparison of their school and family and how these affect children academic progress (Becker and Epstein, 1982, Epstein, 1986, Epstein 1982, and Epstein and Dauber as cited by Dauber and Epstein, 1989). However, few studies which focussed on schools with a large population of children with poor educational attainment or "hard to reach" parents, have suggested that parents with poor educational backgrounds do not want to or cannot be involved in their children's school attainment. In comparing two first- grade classrooms, in a study carried out in a middle-class neighbourhood and lower-income neighbourhood with teachers of both schools having similar expectations, Lareau (1987) observed that parents from the low-income community are unfamiliar with the school curriculum, spent less time helping their children with their school work at home, and were less interested in participating in their children's school programs. They expressed the fact that they give less time and flexibility to meet the expected involvement by the school. Few of the parents also specified that their responsibilities were limited to caring for their children's basic needs of clothing, emotional support, and socialising manners (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Lareau, 1987). Similarly, in another study by Lareau (1994), low-income parents admitted to the fact that lack of self-confidence on their children's school matters have prevented them from promoting a relationship between the home and school. They see their roles to be different from that of their children school teachers. Swap (1993) in support to this point also suggested that some parents tend to believe that allowing children to do their school work alone at home is a way of helping them to be independence, but in my opinion, parents should be role models for their children even in assisting them with their school work at home, to boost their confidence in them, and encourage pupils academic progress in school, it is therefore, necessary in the present study to investigate parental role I children's school and learning activities. This becomes relevant in view of the fact that much has not been really achieved in this area in Nigeria.

Parent-Teacher relationship and effect on children's academic progress

The involvement of parents or school and family connections is one important aspect of school effectiveness to be considered because it contributes to successful family environment that produce successful learners. Some research has shown that parental involvement in their children school and learning activities have helped in creating positive learning and attitudes in children's attainments in schools and aspirations. The success of children in their academic attainments in all grade levels have been tied to parental participation in school and encouraged learning at home, whatever the educational background or social class of their parents. (Dauber and Epstein, 1989). This seem to agree with the study carried out by Adeyemo (2005) in Nigeria on parental involvement, interest in schooling and school environment as predictors of academic self-efficacy among fresh secondary school students in Oyo state, which suggested that most parents desire the best for their children in life and would like to give all necessary support. So, in circumstances where the school and the home are working towards the same goal of achieving the best for their children, will result to a successful school attainment and progress. It is in this perspective that the relationship between parental involvement and children's school and academic progress should be understood.

Another important tool for parental involvement in children school and learning activities, is the inclusion of parents by the schools especially those parents who would not become involved on their own, because recent research have shown that schools' programs and teachers' attitudes in encouraging parents to be involved in their children's school progress have produce positive effects on parents abilities to help their children across all grades, especially in assisting or providing an alternative help in children's school work at home. (Dauber and Epstein, 1989).

The attitudes and relationship between parents and teachers or schools of their children in achieving academic progress in school and at home, is important on behalf of the children in their educational attainment. Some research studies have also shown that parental involvement in children school and learning activities promotes good relationship between parents, teachers, and the school. Epstein (1995), for instance, see parental involvement as families and communities who actively involve themselves in creating a caring educational setting in their children schools. The study further declares that most parents who are active in their children school activities, are those who steadily establish good parental skills with their children at home and school, communicate with the school and their children teachers regularly to be updated on their children school progress, and sometimes volunteer their time to understand their children's school programmes and help where necessary, they are always willing to assist their children with school homework and learning at home, they participate in school-related decision making on behalf of their children in promoting educational progress at school, and they regularly cooperate with the school community in achieving progress. Similarly, Christensen and Cleary (1990), also suggested that parental role in children school and learning activities gives greater opportunities for parents and the school in recognising teachers' skills in teaching, and relating with children and parents, will help teachers to have better evaluations from their headteachers or principals, parents will be encouraged in understanding the curriculum and other school activities and are set out for the children in their schools, and schools will be having higher ratings in effectiveness and programme success. Loucks (1992) opined to the fact that parental involvement in children school and learning activities was an

important factor in quickening and sustaining children academic performance and progress in school. However, some research suggests that the perception of teachers or parents on parental role in children school and learning activities may be biased, because teachers often evaluate, or see children and parents from under-privilege or low-income socio-economic status as negative influence and may hesitate in relating with them as supposed to, than their peers from a higher-income socio-economic status. More so, teachers who particularly do not see parental school involvement as necessary may tend to anticipate minority or low-income parents and this may encourage substandard treatment of pupils and of parents when they become involved in children school activities (Epstein and Dauber, 1991). In the context of this study, the need for parental involvement and creating an enabling school environment to help the children's interest in schooling and make them develop high academic self-confidence in their school progress will be the focus.

Influence of academic support parents give to their children at home on school attainment

Previous research as cited by Topor, Keane, Shelton, and Calkins, (2010), on the role of parent in children school and learning activities suggested that parents who have positive attitude and willingness to help in their children's education, school, and teacher can influence their children's academic performance and school progress positively in every grade level of the child. They establish this relationship by engaging themselves with the child / children in learning to improve the child's self-perception of his or her reasoning ability and increase self-reliance in them. For example, sitting with the children while they do their homework, reading to them, or even explaining some difficult words or terms for them, or just to seat by them to encourage them, like in case of children in higher grades. They get engaged with the teacher and school to promote a stronger and more positive pupil-teacher relationship and parent-teacher and school relationship which results in children achieving good academic performance and relationships in the school environment. In another report by Nye, Turner, and Schwartz (2006) in their review on approaches to parent involvement for improving the academic performance of elementary school age children, opined to the fact parent involvement in their children's school and learning activities has a positive and significant effect on pupils' overall academic performance and progress in school. The study also showed that the effect is huge enough to have real consequences on parents, practitioners, and policymakers in working together as a group to achieve the best for the children. The report also says that the overall effect suggested that when parents participate in academic enrichment programmes with their children outside of school, like at home, in helping with their reading, writing, and solving mathematics, and in other educational activities in the community such as science competition, results in improved academic performance of their children in school. This study and that of Jeynes (2005), argued against the views that there is little effect of parent involvement in their children school and learning activities on their academic attainment. They argued that their review has revealed convincing support for the use of a parent involvement programme as a feasible supplementary intervention to improve children's academic performance in school, and for the parent involvement component of the No Child Left Behind mandate. In the context of this study, I agree with Jeynes (2005) and Nye, Turner and Schwartz (2006) in their studies, which suggested that parental involvement in children's school and learning activities helps in improving their academic performance and school progress, as this study tends to look into the factors affecting some parents attitudes towards helping their children achieving their desired high school attainments in Nigeria.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design has been adopted to investigate parental role in children school and learning activities. As a survey, questionnaires and interviews are used to obtain information from parents in schools in the area of study with the aim of establishing the importance of parental role in their children school and learning activities in their academic progress. The information obtained are used to make comparisons and draw assumptions about the observed conditions without manipulating any variable in the study. Salaria (2012, quoted in Aggarwal, 2008) explained descriptive study as a dedicated method of gathering information about dominant facts or conditions for the purpose of describing and interpreting such situations.

Private schools located in Port Harcourt Metropolis and affordable to low and middle-income earners have been purposively selected for the study. This category of private schools has been so selected considering the state of public schools in Nigeria. As a result of the neglect of education, most parents do not send their children to public schools that are supposedly free. Two (2) of the selected category of primary schools were randomly selected for the study. The study involves forty parents from two schools with pupils in primary 2 and 4 respectively. Parents of five pupils from the top and five from the bottom grades (as classified from school assessments) in each of the selected classes were purposively recruited to ascertain the level of parents' involvement in their children school and learning activities. In all, a sample of 40 parents of children whose performances are either in the top 5 or bottom 5 in the classes selected were used for the study.

A thorough search of the literature guided by the research questions informed the inclusion of questions in the instruments. The main instrument for the study is the Questionnaire For Parents (QFP) that was designed by the researchers to elicit responses on parental roles in children school and learning activities. The instrument is non-cognitive because there is no right or wrong response given by participants to questions asked by the researchers. The instrument has sixteen (16) questions which were developed to address research questions on issues of parental role in children school and learning activities. It consists of questions to elicit personal data from parents, such as socio-economic status, level of education, job types of parents and home types. The following criteria were used to classify parents: level of education, employment status and job type, type of accommodation, and where family members receive medical care. In Nigeria, these are some of the elements to measure socio-economic status. For instance, as medical care and treatment is not free in the country, peasants and those who cannot afford to pay for good health care patronise faith-based institution and homes and patient medicine stores, while the well-to-do attend to their medical needs in private clinics abroad - like India, Europe or America. The QFP also contains questions about the relationship between parents and the school of their children, role of parents in children school and learning activities. The Interview Questions For Parents (IQFP) which consist of 10 questions was designed to generate some qualitative data as a follow up for the questionnaire. It provided further basis and data triangulation to appropriately address the research questions for the study. Descriptive statistics such as means and percentages were used to analyse data and to answer the research questions.

Results

Research question one

Does the socio-economic status of parents affect their involvement with their children's schooling?

Parents of pupils who were recruited for the study were classified into three socio-economic classes. The socio-economic status of parents of school pupils involved in this study, based on the researchers' classification is presented in table 1

Table 1: Parents' socio-economic status

| Classification | N (frequency) | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| High | 2 | 5 |
| Middle | 18 | 45 |
| Low | 20 | 50 |
| Total | 40 | 100 |

Data as shown in Table 1 reveals that only 5% of the parents in schools used for the study are grouped into the high socio-economic status. 45% are in the middle class while 50% of parents are of the low socio-economic status.

The distribution of the socio-economic class of parents among the performance groups (top and bottom 5's) was also computed and is presented in Table 1a. The data is illustrated graphically as Figure 1.

Table 1a: Parents' socio-economic status of pupils' performance groups

| Socio-economic classes | Top 5 | | Bottom 5 | |
|------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | N | % | N | % |
| Low | 5 | 25 | 15 | 75 |
| Middle | 14 | 70 | 4 | 20 |
| High | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| Total | 20 | 100 | 20 | 100 |

The result shows that children whose parents are in the 'low' socio-economic class dominates the 'bottom 5' performance group with 75% and only 25% featuring in the 'top 5' group, while children whose parents are in the 'middle' class dominate the 'top 5' performance group with 70%.

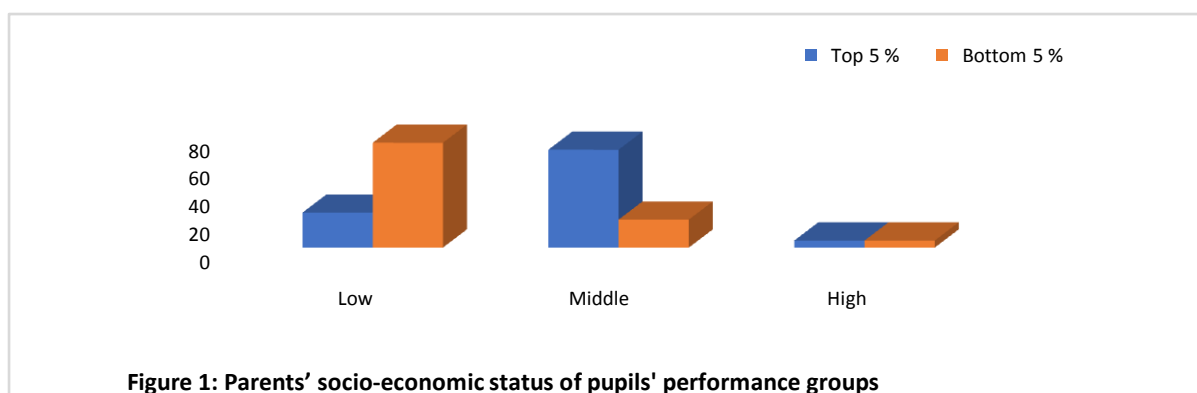


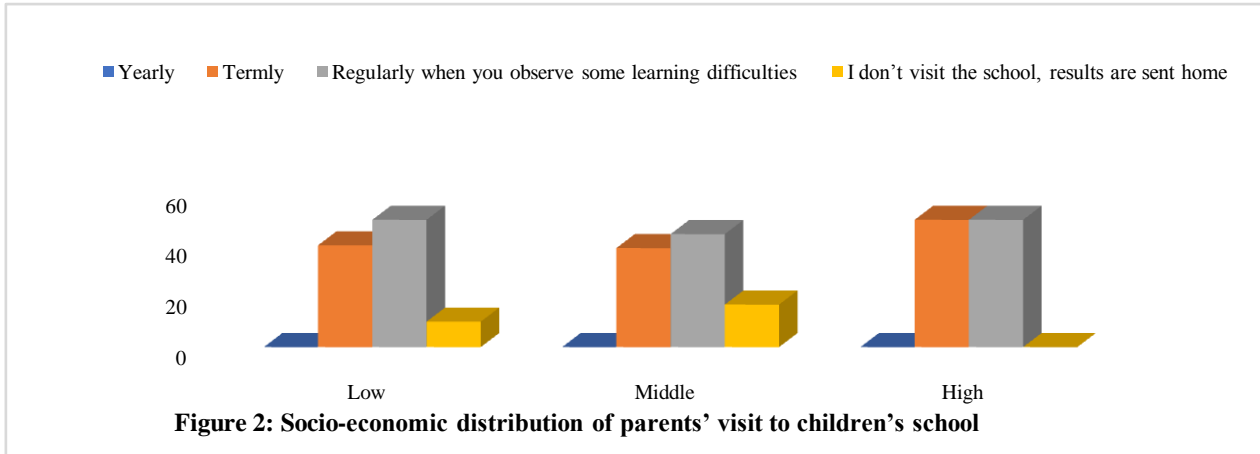
Figure 1: Parents' socio-economic status of pupils' performance groups

Only 20% of children whose parents are in the middle socio-economic class were among the 'bottom 5' performance group. Only 2 parents were classified into the 'high' socio-economic class with 5% each in the 'top' and 'bottom' 5 performance groups.

Parent' visits to their children's school was further investigated among the various socio-economic classes. The data and graph of the distribution are shown in Table 2 and Figure 2. Data as shown in Table 2 reveals that there seem not to be any clear difference in the visit of parents to the school of their children irrespective of the socio-economic class they belong to. However, the data shows that most parents visit their children's teachers or schools on the well-being of their kids either termly or regularly when they find some learning difficulties with their children.

Table 2: Socio-economic distribution of parents' visit to children's school

| Responses | Socio-economic classes(%) | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------|------------|
| | Low | Middle | High |
| Yearly | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Termly | 40 | 38.9 | 50 |
| Regularly when you observe some learning difficulties | 50 | 44.4 | 50 |
| I don't visit the school, results are sent home | 10 | 16.7 | 0 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |



The participation of parents in PTA activities in schools attended by their children was also investigated in terms of the socio-economic status of the parents. Results are presented in Table 3 and Figure 3. Data on the socio-economic distribution of parents' participation in PTA activities of schools attended by their children as shown in Table 3 reveals that 50% of parents in the Low socio-economic class never attempted to participate in PTA activities. Among the Middle socio-economic class, more parents (55.6%) participate in activities sometimes when they are available with 22.2% participating in activities all the time or never attempted. All two participants classed in the High socio-economic group participate in PTA activities only sometimes when they are available.

Table 3: Socio-economic distribution of parents' participation in PTA activities

| Responses | Socio-economic classes(%) | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|----------|------------|
| | Low | | Middle | | High | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| All the time | 4 | 22.2 | 4 | 22.2 | 0 | 0 |
| Never attempted | 9 | 50 | 4 | 22.2 | 0 | 0 |
| Sometimes when I am available | 5 | 27.8 | 10 | 55.6 | 2 | 100 |
| Total | 18 | 100 | 18 | 100 | 2 | 100 |

Only two parents were interviewed in this study. They were asked if they actively participate in the PTA activities of their children's school. Their responses are presented below:

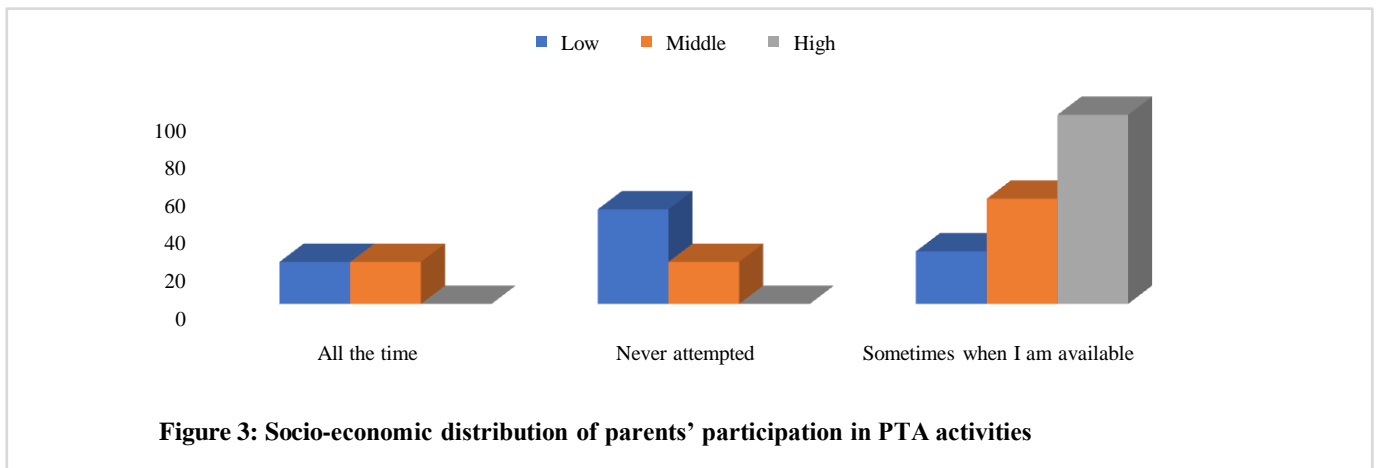


Figure 3: Socio-economic distribution of parents' participation in PTA activities

“Well, once in a while, let me put it that way...” (Parent 1).

“I normally come once in a while... but sometimes, my husband comes. If I don't have chance, my husband comes and reports to me ...” (Parent 2).

Parent 2 also elaborated on some benefits of her interaction with the school:

“...we talk about the uniform, stockings, sportswear, canvas. We get the information from the school directly so as a mother when you come back home, you have to correct yourself, putting things in order... when you come back from the PTA meeting, you have to take those information as a guide to yourself...” (Parent 2).

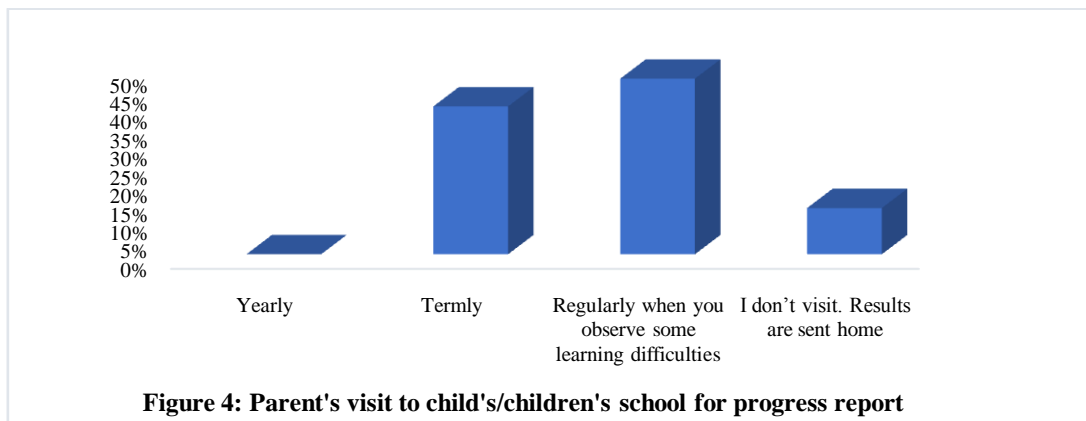
Research question two

To what extent do parents relate with teachers and school of their children?

Parent’s response to questions on the questionnaire have been used to answer research question two and presented in Table 4 and Figure 4. Responses from parents on how often they visit the school of their children to find out how well they are faring reveal that most parents (47.5%) regularly visit their children’s school to discuss with teachers when they observe some learning difficulties with their children. Also, the data shows that 40% of parents only visit the school of their children “termly”, while 12.5 % of parents do not go to their children’s school to discuss issues regarding the progress of their children with their teachers or school authorities as ‘results are sent home’ by the school.

Table 4: How often parents visit child’s/children’s school for progress report

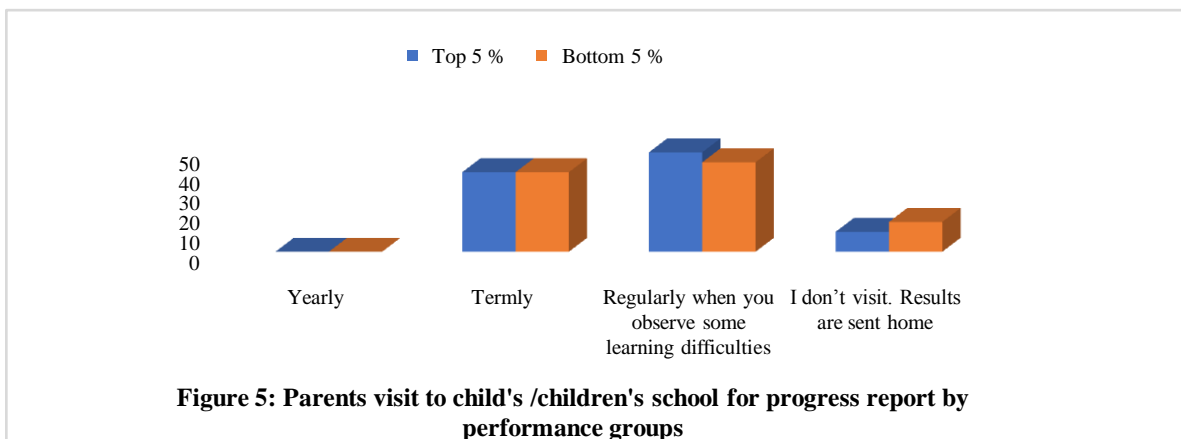
| Responses | N (frequency) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Yearly | 0 | 0 |
| Termly | 16 | 40 |
| Regularly when you observe some learning difficulties | 19 | 47.5 |
| I don’t visit. Results are sent home | 5 | 12.5 |
| Total | 40 | 100 |



The visit of parents to their children’s school to discuss their children’s progress was also investigated for the performance groups. The data in Table 5 shows that 50% of parents whose children are in the ‘top’ 5 regularly visit their children’s school when they observe some learning difficulties with their children. In the ‘bottom’ 5 group, 45% of parents visit regularly when they observe learning difficulties with their children. Although with a small margin, more parents (15%) whose children were in the ‘bottom 5’ do not visit their children’s school to discuss the progress of their children in school compared to the 10% of parents whose children are in the ‘top 5’. Most parents who do not visit the school also indicated that they do not have time to do so as a result of business and work-related commitments. The data is presented using a chart in Figure 5.

Table 5: How often parents visit child’s/children’s school for progress report by performance groups

| Responses | Top 5 | | Bottom 5 | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | N | % | N | % |
| Yearly | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Termly | 8 | 40 | 8 | 40 |
| Regularly when you observe some learning difficulties | 10 | 50 | 9 | 45 |
| I don’t visit. Results are sent home | 2 | 10 | 3 | 15 |
| Total | 20 | 100 | 20 | 100 |



Another questionnaire item that gives an insight into the relationship between parents and the school is question 5: “when last did you have a chat with your child’s/children’s class teacher about your child’s school performance?” This question was conceived to make for situations where parents may not be physically chanced to visit the school and so possibly make calls or other “chats” to check up their child’s school performance. Questionnaires were distributed in the 9/10 week of the school term and retrieved even up to the 11th week. This implies that children have been in school during the term for 10 - 11 weeks at the time of retrieval of the questionnaires. Response from parents on the frequency of their communication with their children’s school or class teachers is presented in Table 6 while Figure 6 is a graphical illustration of the information. Only 36 parents responded to the question.

Table 6: Last time Parent had a chat with teacher on child’s performance

| Responses | N (frequency) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Last session | 9 | 25 |
| Last month | 11 | 30.5 |
| Last week | 10 | 27.8 |
| I have got no need for a chat | 6 | 16.7 |
| Total | 36 | 100 |

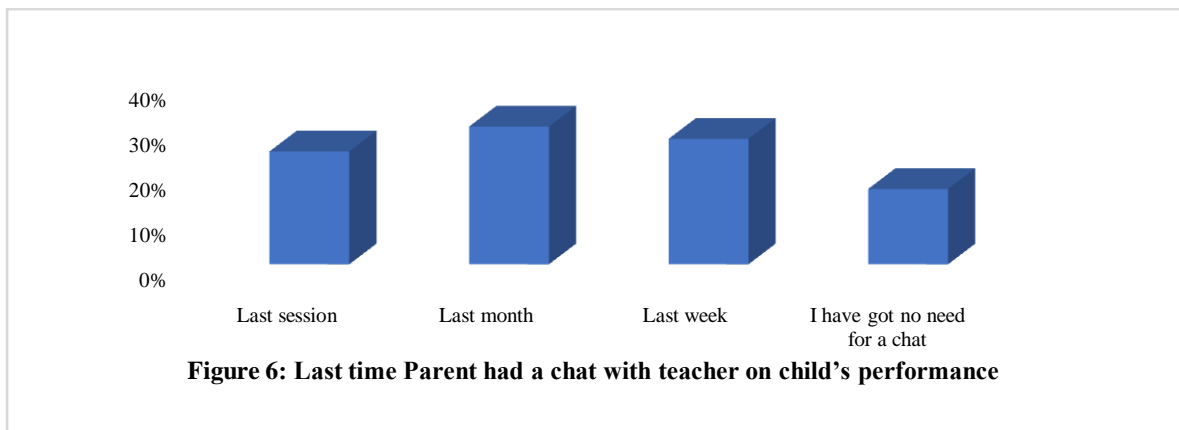


Figure 6: Last time Parent had a chat with teacher on child’s performance

Data as shown in Table 6 indicates that only 27.8% of parents had chats with their children’s teacher in the ‘last week’ as at the time of data collection. 30.5% indicated ‘last month’, 25% ‘last session’ while 16.7% said they ‘have got no need for a chat’. The data suggests the frequency of parents’ communication with their children’s school teachers on the school performance of their children.

Parents’ communications with their children’s class teachers was also investigated in terms of the ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ performance groups. The data is presented in Table 7 and Figure 7.

Table 7: Last time Parent had a chat with teacher on child’s performance by performance groups

| Responses | Top 5 | | Bottom 5 | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | N | % | N | % |
| Last session | 5 | 26.3 | 4 | 23.5 |
| Last month | 7 | 36.8 | 4 | 23.5 |
| Last week | 5 | 26.3 | 5 | 29.4 |
| I have got no need for a chat | 2 | 10.5 | 4 | 23.5 |
| Total | 19 | 100 | 17 | 100 |

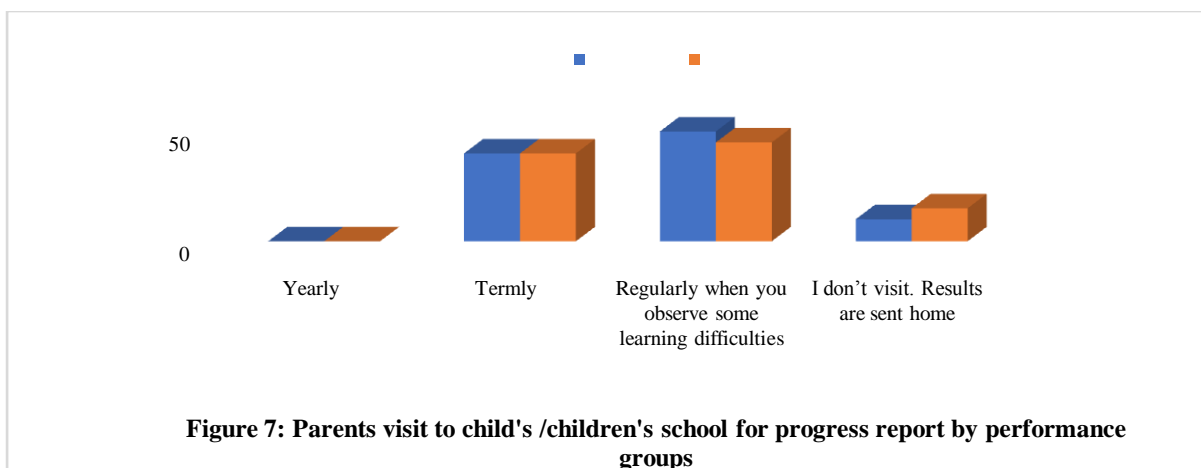


Figure 7: Parents visit to child's /children's school for progress report by performance groups

The data as shown in Table 7 does not seem to reveal any significant difference on the frequency of parental communication with the school or teachers with most parents irrespective of the performance group of their children saying they had a chat with the teachers either 'last month' or 'last week'. However, a close look at the data reveals that the percentage of parents (23.5%) whose children are in the bottom 5 performance group responded that they 'have got no need for a chat' more than that (10.5%) of parents whose children are in the top 5 performance group.

Questions were also included in the questionnaire to assess how parents relate with teachers and school of their children in terms of their participation in PTA activities. The result shows that most parents (51.3%) do not actively participate in PTA activities in their children's school. The common reason given by most of them is "lack of time" and "nature of the job". Responses from parents also indicate that only few parents (21.1%) participate in PTA activities "all the time". This result is an indication of the value parents place to attend to matters relating to the academic well-being of their children in schools.

Parents participation in PTA activities was also examined in terms of the performance groups of pupils and presented in Table 8 and Figure 8. Data as shown in the table demonstrates that more parents (26.3% compared to 15.8%) whose children are in the 'bottom 5' group participate in school PTA activities than parents of children in the 'top 5'. Also, that more parents (42.1%) whose children are in the 'bottom 5' never attempted to participate in PTA activities than those (26.3%) whose children are in the 'top 5'.

Table 8: Parents' regularity in participating in PTA activities by performance groups

| Responses | Top 5 | | Bottom 5 | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | N | % | N | % |
| All the time | 3 | 15.8 | 5 | 26.3 |
| Never attempted | 5 | 26.3 | 8 | 42.1 |
| Sometimes when I am available | 11 | 57.9 | 6 | 31.6 |
| Total | 19 | 100 | 19 | 100 |

Research question three

What level of academic support do parents give to their children at home?

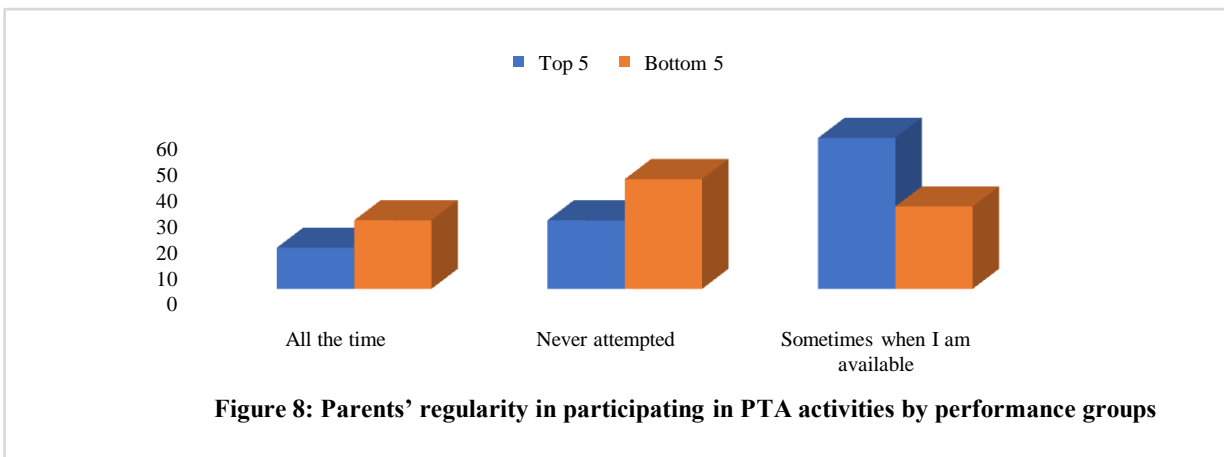


Figure 8: Parents' regularity in participating in PTA activities by performance groups

Parents' response on "how often do you go through your child's/children's books with them at home" is presented in Table 9.

Table 4.5: How often parents go through their children's school books

| Responses | N (frequency) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Weekly | 8 | 20 |
| Every day | 20 | 50 |
| Sometimes | 10 | 25 |
| I hardly do | 2 | 5 |
| Total | 40 | 100 |

Data as shown in Table 9 reveals that 50% of parents find time to go through the school work of their children with them after school. The result also shows that 20% of parents go through their children's books with them weekly while 5% 'hardly do'.

The researchers also investigated how often parents find time to go through their children's books with them after school among the various socio-economic parental classes. The result is presented in Table 10 and Figure 10. The result shows that only 35% of parents in the low socio-economic class could go through their children's books with them at home. Over 72% of parents in the middle socio-economic class assist their children with their school work at home with 50% of parents in the High class provide such support for their children at home.

Table 10: Parental home academic support among socio-economic classes

| Responses | Socio-economic classes(%) | | | | | |
|--------------|---------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|----------|------------|
| | Low | | Middle | | High | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Weekly | 4 | 20 | 3 | 16.7 | 0 | 0 |
| Every day | 7 | 35 | 13 | 72.2 | 1 | 50 |
| Sometimes | 8 | 40 | 1 | 5.6 | 1 | 50 |
| I hardly do | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5.6 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 20 | 100 | 18 | 100 | 2 | 100 |

How often parents go through their children’s books with them after school at home was also investigated by the performance groups of their children. The data is presented in Table 11 and Figure 11. The result shows that 70% parents whose children do well in class – in the ‘top 5’ assist with their children’s school work every day. The percentage is significantly lower (30%) for parents whose children are in the bottom 5 in class

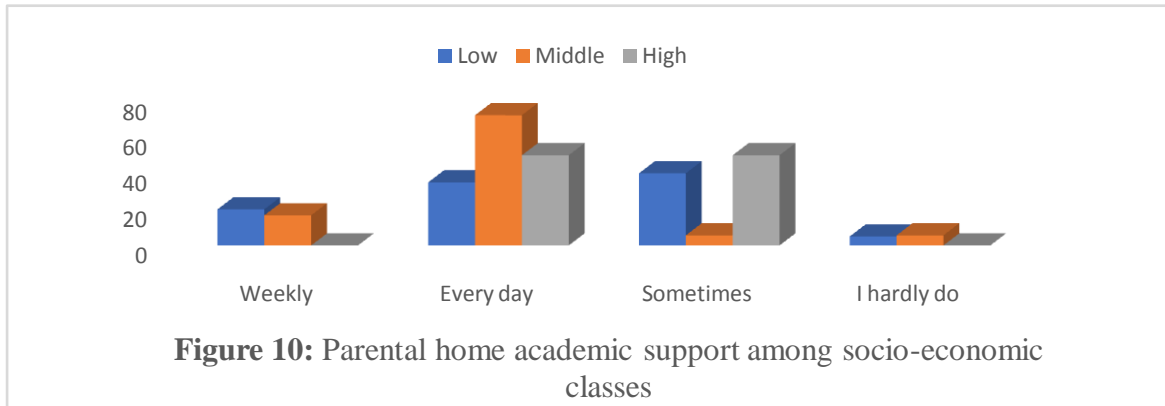


Figure 10: Parental home academic support among socio-economic classes

performance. Also, although low, 10% of parents whose children do not do well in class say they hardly find time to go through their children’s books with them at home.

Table 11: Parents’ home academic support to their children by performance groups

| Responses | Top 5 | | Bottom 5 | |
|--------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | N | % | N | % |
| Weekly | 4 | 20 | 4 | 20 |
| Every day | 14 | 70 | 6 | 30 |
| Sometimes | 2 | 10 | 8 | 40 |
| I hardly do | 0 | 0 | 2 | 10 |
| Total | 20 | 100 | 20 | 100 |

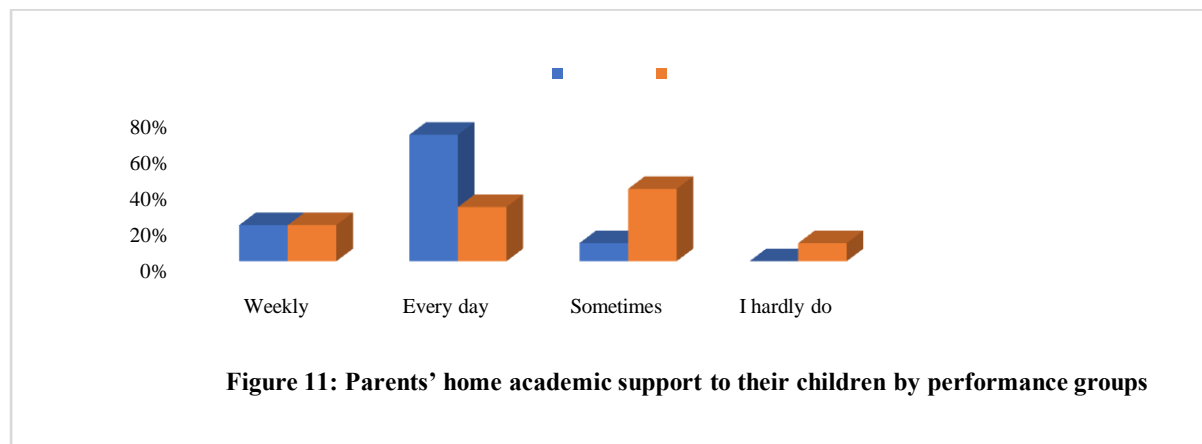


Figure 11: Parents’ home academic support to their children by performance groups

Another question in the questionnaire that enquired about the level of academic support parents offer to their children at home is the question “do you find it interesting to assist your child/children with their homework and discussing their progress in school with them?” The result shows that generally, 64.1% of parents find assisting their children with their school work at home interesting ‘all the time’, and that nearly 80% of parents who find it interesting “all the time” to assist their children with their homework and to discuss their progress in school have children who do well in school. Also, that more parents (78.9%) of children in the top 5 find it more interesting ‘all the time’ to discuss homework and learning progress with their children than parents (50%) of children in the bottom 5.

Interview data also suggests that parents were interested in assisting their children with their school work at home.

“I feel excited because when I guide them do and see the way they are doing it themselves, I feel happy because I see that they are improving. I take it a thing of joy. It does not bother me” (Parent 1).

Parental provisions of school working materials for their children was also investigated in terms of the school performance groups of the children. Result of parent’s responses on their provision of working materials for learning by performance groups shows that 90% of parents whose children are in the top 5 provide complete working materials for their children while only 10% do not. For the bottom 5 performance group, 70% provide complete working materials while 30% do not. The result implies that children who receive better support in the provision of required working materials both at home and in school tend to perform better than those who lack required materials to work with in school and at home.

Another questionnaire item that was used to elicit the academic support parents render to their children is the question “is there provision for extra effort in supporting your child/children academic progress at home?” The result shows that 51.3% of parents made provisions for extra support for their children’s learning by engaging lesson teachers at home. 48.7% of parents did not hire after-school lesson teachers for their children. Most parents who made arrangements for home tutors gave reasons such as “to make the child more studious than playful at home”, “to boost the child’s academic progress”, “to improve their learning”. On the other hand, most parents who did not make provision for their children gave reasons bothering on lack of finance to engage a home tutor. A few said they did not make provision because their children were doing well in school, older siblings help them at home or they (the parents) assist as home tutors with their children.

Qualitative data from interviews on the provision of extra support for children’s education indicates that parents who could afford engage home-tutors for their children.

“Right now, we have one in the house. He comes three days in the week... they come from the school here to assist the child and at the end of the month, we pay the teacher” (Parent 2).

Discussion of findings

The first Research Question sought to know whether the socio-economic status of parents affect their involvement with school attended by their children. Findings from the study suggest that the socio-economic status of parents affects their involvement with the school of their children. However, data on parents visit to children’s school did not show any clear difference among the socio-economic groups. The finding of the present study that the socio-economic status of parents affect their involvement in schools attended by their children with parents of higher status showing more involvement than those of lower status, is consistent with the result of Lareau’s (1987) study which reported that parents from low socio-economic communities were unfamiliar with school curriculum, spend lesser time working with their children after school and were uninterested in programmes organised by their children’s school. Also, the finding of the present study that suggests that parents visit to children’s school showed no clear difference among the socio-economic groups agrees with the result of Dauber and Epstein (1989) who conducted their study among ‘economically disadvantaged’ communities like those in Nigeria where the presented study has been conducted, and reported that parents perceive their involvement as important for their children’s learning desires. However, the result that parents’ visit to the school where their children attend did not show any difference among the socio-economic classes is at variance with the report of Lareau (1994), that low income parents acknowledged their lack of self-confidence on academic related issues which posed as a hindrance to the interaction between the school and the home. The difference in outcome between the present study and that of Lareau (1994) may be explained by the small sample size and the unequitable distribution of parents of various socio-economic status that participated in the present study. An increased scope with larger and more representative catchment of parents in the various socio-economic classes may possibly affect the outcome of the study.

The second research question was about how parents relate with teachers and the school of their children. Results from the study indicates that most parents relate with the school and class teachers of their children when they discover learning difficulties with their children. This finding supports the report of earlier studies (for instance, Dauber and Epstein, 1989; Epstein, 1995; Adeyemo, 2005) who maintained that the success children make in their academics have been correlated with parental participation in school and encouragement children received at home. However, the finding that parent-school relationship did not suggest any difference between the low and top performance groups does not agree with those of Topor, *et al.*, (2010) and Nye, *et al.*, (2006) who opined that parents’ involvement in school activities in their children’s school improves the academic performance and progress of children in schools. They explained that parents’ involvement in academic enrichment programmes in conjunction with the school and other educational activities in the community such as science competitions encourages the desire and interest of learning in the children which eventually contributes to improved performance. The difference in outcome between the present study and others as reported may be attributed to the method of data collection used in this study. Most of the data in the present study have been collected using questionnaires. The problem of social desirability bias in questionnaire responses may have influenced the outcome of the present study. On the other hand, the finding that most parents do not actively participate in PTA activities in their children’s school agrees with the result of some studies (for instance, Aremu, *et al.*, 2006; Baker and Stevenson, 1986 and Lareau, 1987) who reported that parents considered provision for the basic family needs and as such find it difficult to regularly involve themselves in school-home related activities.

The third research question sought to investigate the level of academic support parents give to their children. The finding of the present study that most parents especially those in the middle and high classes assist their children with their schoolwork at home is consistent with the conclusions of Topor, *et al.*, (2010) that parents support their children’s learning by sitting with them while they do their homework, read to them, explain difficult terminologies, and sometimes, just sit by them to encourage their learning. Also, the finding that more parents whose children are in the top performance group find more time to support their children’s learning agrees with the views of earlier researchers like Loucks (1992) and Dauber and Epstein (1989). For instance, Loucks (1992) opined that parental involvement in children learning activities enhances and sustains their school performance and progress while Dauber and Epstein (1989) maintained that the academic success and attainment of children in school correlates positively with parental participation and encouraged learning at home.

Implications of the results

The results of the present study have great implications to educational policy makers, school heads, teachers, parents, and guidance counsellors.

On the implication to educational policy makers, the study reported the positive association between parents' socio-economic status and their involvement in their children's school programmes. It is therefore important for policy makers in designing school curricula and calendar to consider flexibility with the various categories of parents, considering work hours to ensure their availability for a more fruitful home-school relationship. Also, business and employers of labour need to create some flexibility in their work schedules to allow staff to involve themselves with their children's school programmes.

The finding on parental support and participation in school programmes on pupils' attainment in the present study also has some implication to school heads, teachers, and guidance counsellors. School heads and teachers therefore need to encourage good parental involvement in school activities and maintain good home-school relationship.

The study also has some implications for parents. Parents would need to prioritise the time and commitment to their children's learning by regular involvement in school organised parents' fora, assisting their children with school work and making provision for their socialisation which enhances children's learning experiences.

Conclusion

The study investigated the role of parents in children's school and learning activities in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Results from this study suggests that the socio-economic status of parents affects their involvement with the school of their children. It is therefore important that government take necessary steps to reduce the wide economic gap in families by policies that encourage the poor to have access to social services that would enable them to proudly relate with the school of their children. Also, school heads and teachers should necessarily seek ways to encourage parents irrespective of their status and get them involved in school programmes and fares. Data from this study also indicates that most parents relate with teachers and school of their children 'termly' or 'regularly' when learning difficulties are observed in their children and that most parents do not participate actively in the PTA activities in their children's school. It is important that parents, teachers and school heads seek ways of monitoring the progress of children both at home and in school to ensure that children are promptly supported to reach their set targets.

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