Epstein's Model and Curriculum Implementation: A Framework for Strengthening Parental Engagement in Nigerian Schools

Dorcas M. Ayoola-Abolade; Omolara A. Areo
Faculty of Education, The Nigerian Baptist
Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso
oareo@nbts.edu.ng , https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9890-3667X
dorcasmayoolaabolade@gmail.com
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Abstract
Research on curriculum implementation has concentrated on teachers, school leaders and education authorities, leaving the home and community side of the process comparatively underexamined. This paper argues that parental involvement is a structural component of curriculum implementation rather than an activity that happens around it. Working from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Epstein's (2001) school–family–community partnership model, the paper develops the Epstein–Curriculum Implementation Partnership Framework, which ties each of Epstein's six dimensions of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community) to a corresponding curriculum implementation function. The argument draws on work separating involvement from engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), meta-analytic evidence on involvement and achievement (Wilder, 2014; Castro et al., 2015; Boonk et al., 2018), research on barriers to participation (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018), and Nigerian evidence that parental participation in curriculum matters is typically thin in practice (Olibie, 2014; Afolabi, 2014). One qualification runs through the framework: the link between partnership and implementation outcomes is conditional rather than automatic. Partnership can improve the conditions under which a curriculum is received, interpreted and reinforced, but it cannot compensate for shortages of qualified teachers, instructional resources, effective leadership or coherent curriculum policy (Rogan & Grayson, 2003). The paper closes with implications for curriculum planners, school leaders, teachers and policy makers, together with an agenda for testing the framework empirically in Nigerian schools.

Keywords: *parental involvement; parental engagement; Epstein's model; curriculum implementation; school–family–community partnership; Nigeria*

Introduction

Curriculum implementation is the phase at which curriculum intentions, goals, content, learning experiences, instructional strategies and assessment procedures are translated into actual teaching and learning. Teachers and school administrators are usually treated as the principal actors in that translation, yet the process extends past the physical and organisational boundaries of the school. Learners' educational experiences are shaped by the interaction of school, family and community environments. How far parents understand, support and participate in their children's education therefore has consequences for how effectively curriculum objectives become learning.

Parental involvement is better understood as a component of the broader curriculum implementation process than as an auxiliary activity surrounding schooling. Olibie (2014, 65)

argues that "despite its recognised importance, parents are commonly positioned at the margins of curriculum processes." Their participation may be limited to attending parent–teacher meetings, responding to disciplinary concerns, contributing financially to school activities, or assisting children with homework. Participation of that kind is valuable, though it does not amount to sustained partnership in curriculum implementation. Parents may have few opportunities to understand curriculum expectations, contribute to decisions affecting their children's learning, reinforce classroom experiences at home, or connect the school with relevant community resources. The result is a gap between the school as the formal site of curriculum delivery and the home and community settings in which much of children's learning and development also takes place. Joyce Epstein's school–family–community partnership model offers a comprehensive basis for understanding and organising parental involvement. Epstein conceptualises school, family and community as overlapping spheres of influence and identifies six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2001). Instead of treating parents as peripheral participants in schooling, the model positions families as partners in children's learning and development. The six dimensions give schools several routes into partnership, from the creation of supportive home environments and clear communication through to shared decision making and collaboration with community resources (Epstein et al., 2019). The model has been applied widely to the study of school, family and community relationships, but its potential as a framework for examining and strengthening parental involvement specifically within curriculum implementation has received less attention. Much of the literature concentrates on outcomes such as academic achievement, attendance, behaviour and homework support (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Wilder, 2014; Castro et al., 2015). Those outcomes matter, yet parental involvement also shapes the conditions under which a curriculum is interpreted, delivered, reinforced, evaluated and connected to learners' everyday experience. Applying the six dimensions to curriculum implementation therefore allows parental participation to be reconceptualised as a strategic partnership rather than an occasional supportive activity. The thesis of this paper is that Epstein's six dimensions can provide a structured framework for strengthening the relationship between parental involvement and curriculum implementation. Where school leadership coordinates them intentionally and adapts them to Nigerian social and cultural realities, these dimensions can promote greater continuity between school-based learning, home-based support and community resources. Effective curriculum implementation should therefore move beyond a school-centred approach towards a collaborative one in which parents and communities support, reinforce, enrich and, where appropriate, inform curriculum processes. Such an approach repositions parents from passive recipients of school information to active partners in their children's educational development (Ajayi & Afolabi, 2012). This paper adopts a conceptual, literature-based approach and reports no primary empirical data. It examines established scholarship on school–family–community partnerships, on parental involvement and on curriculum implementation, and uses that literature to build a conceptual relationship between the three areas.

Theoretical Framework

This paper situates Epstein's model within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which treats human development as the product of nested and interacting environmental systems rather than of any single setting acting alone. Bronfenbrenner distinguished the microsystem, in which the child interacts directly with immediate settings such as the family and the classroom, from the mesosystem, which concerns the connections between those settings, including the relationship between a child's home and a child's school. Epstein's (2001) model operationalises this mesosystem insight for education by treating school, family and

community as overlapping spheres of influence that jointly shape a child's learning. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) account of why parents become involved adds a motivational layer to the same picture, since parents act on their construction of the parental role, their sense of efficacy and the invitations they receive from schools.

This grounding matters for curriculum implementation because it moves the family from passive recipient of curriculum outcomes to active participant in the mesosystem through which curriculum experiences are interpreted and reinforced. Where school and home practices align, for instance where a school's expectations for reading are understood and supported at home, the ecological perspective predicts steadier conditions for learning than where the two settings operate without reference to one another. Empirical work is broadly consistent with that expectation. Castro et al. (2015) report that the involvement practices most strongly associated with achievement are those built around supervision of learning, high academic expectations and communication about school activities, while Boonk et al. (2018) note that the strength of the association varies considerably from one indicator to another. The theoretical claim advanced here is accordingly modest. Family involvement does not determine implementation outcomes; it forms part of the ecological context within which any curriculum is enacted, and that context has been undertheorized in implementation research (Snyder et al., 1992).

Conceptualizing Parental Involvement in Education

Parental Involvement and Engagement

Parental involvement refers broadly to the ways parents and caregivers take part in children's education. Participation may occur at home, at school, or through relationships between the school and the wider community, and it includes supporting routines, discussing schoolwork, attending school activities, communicating with teachers and taking part in school decision making (Epstein, 2001; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). The concept is therefore wider than attendance at parent meetings or help with homework, and reviews of the field show that its various indicators relate to achievement in different degrees (Boonk et al., 2018).

Parental engagement puts more weight on the quality and purpose of parents' participation in learning. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) distinguish involvement from engagement by emphasizing a shift away from activities controlled mainly by schools towards parents' active participation in children's learning. They argue that “parental engagement with learning is about parents’ engagement with the learning of their children, rather than their engagement with the school” (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, 399). This distinction carries weight for curriculum implementation, since a parent may attend a school meeting without understanding the curriculum or gaining any meaningful opportunity to support learning. Engagement therefore calls for a more substantive relationship in which parents understand what learners are expected to achieve and can support those goals appropriately. As Goodall and Montgomery (2014, 399) further explain, “engagement is about the learning of the child, rather than about the school.” Programmes built around this kind of purposeful engagement tend to show stronger effects than general appeals for parental involvement. Jeynes (2012, 34) similarly emphasizes the importance of “parental involvement that is specifically focused on the academic outcomes of children”, suggesting that purposeful parental participation is more closely connected to learners' educational achievement than participation in school activities alone.

Parent–School Partnership

Partnership implies reciprocity. A school that merely informs parents of decisions already taken is not genuinely in partnership with them. Parents are stakeholders whose knowledge,

experience and resources can contribute meaningfully to educational work. Henderson and Mapp (2002, 7) emphasize this reciprocal dimension by describing effective family-school partnerships as relationships in which "families and school staff work together to support children's learning and development." This suggests that partnership goes beyond simply communicating information to parents and instead requires their active contribution to the educational process. Epstein's model further situates this partnership within the relationship among school, family and community, rather than locating responsibility for children's learning in one institution alone. Epstein (2001, 6) explains that "students are the primary actors in their own education," while schools, families and communities share complementary responsibilities in supporting their development. Similarly, Okeke (2014) emphasizes the importance of collaboration between parents and schools in promoting learners' educational development. Thus, genuine partnership involves shared responsibility, mutual contribution and sustained collaboration among the school, family and wider community.

Epstein's School–Family–Community Partnership Model

Epstein's model treats school, family and community as overlapping spheres of influence in children's education. Epstein (2001, 4) describes this perspective through the idea that "schools, families, and communities are overlapping spheres of influence" in children's development and education. The model identifies six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2001). These are not isolated activities but interconnected areas through which schools can organise partnership practices. Epstein et al. (2019, 7) emphasize that effective partnership programmes involve "a comprehensive approach to school, family, and community partnerships**"**, suggesting that the six types are most useful when developed as a coordinated programme rather than as a series of unrelated events. Sheldon (2003) similarly associates systematic partnership practices with improved educational outcomes.

Parenting

Parenting concerns the home conditions families establish to support children's development and learning. Epstein (2001, 5) explains that this type of involvement helps families **"**establish home environments to support children as students.**"** For curriculum implementation, this dimension therefore bears directly on learner readiness. Information from schools about routines, child development, positive discipline and study habits can strengthen the conditions in which curriculum experiences are received and supported at home (Epstein, 2001; Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2012).

Communicating

This dimension concerns effective two-way channels between schools and families. Epstein (2001, 5) defines communication as the development of "effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress." Curriculum implementation requires parents to know what children are learning, what is expected of them and how progress is assessed. Communication should therefore be regular, clear and purposeful rather than confined to disciplinary matters and end-of-term reports (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Volunteering

Volunteering opens routes for parents to contribute time, knowledge and skills to school activities. Epstein (2001, 5) describes this dimension as providing **"recruitment and organization of parent help and support."** Within curriculum implementation, such

participation can support practical learning, cultural activities, reading programmes, excursions and other experiences that connect curriculum content with real situations (Olaleye & Omotayo, 2009). Participation should nevertheless remain flexible, because family circumstances differ. As Lareau (1987) demonstrates, patterns of parental participation can be shaped by social and economic circumstances; consequently, schools should avoid forms of volunteering that unintentionally exclude parents whose work or economic responsibilities prevent regular attendance.

Learning at Home

Learning at home bears directly on curriculum reinforcement. Epstein (2001, 5) defines this dimension as providing "information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities**,** decisions, and planning." Parents need not act as substitute teachers. They can support learning by establishing study routines, encouraging reading, discussing classroom experiences, monitoring assignments and taking an interest in their children's progress (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Schools can strengthen this dimension by providing clear guidance on what useful home-based support looks like. Jeynes (2012) similarly emphasizes the importance of parental practices that are directly connected to children's academic development rather than general participation that has no clear learning purpose.

Decision Making

This dimension concerns parents' participation in school governance and policy. Epstein (2001, 5) describes decision making as "including parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives." Applied to curriculum implementation, it opens space for families to contribute to discussions about curriculum adaptation, school priorities and approaches to learner support (Nwangwu & Aguba, 2014). Participation of substance requires more than an invitation to attend a meeting. Parents need access to relevant information and a genuine opportunity to contribute to decisions affecting their children's education (Olibie, 2014). In this sense, decision making represents a shift from parents being recipients of school decisions to becoming participants in processes that shape educational practice.

Collaborating with the Community

Community collaboration extends partnership beyond individual families. Epstein (2001, 5) describes this dimension as "identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development." Schools can therefore work with community organisations, professionals, cultural institutions, health services, businesses and other local resources to enrich learning (Yusuf & Ajere, 2015). The dimension carries particular weight where schools have limited resources and where local knowledge can make curriculum content more meaningful. Offorma (2005) similarly highlights the importance of relating educational content to the cultural and social environment of learners. Community collaboration consequently provides an avenue through which curriculum implementation can draw on resources, knowledge and experiences beyond the formal school environment.

Understanding Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation refers to the process through which curriculum intentions are translated into actual teaching and learning experiences. It represents the stage at which the goals, content, learning experiences and assessment expectations contained in curriculum documents are interpreted and put into practice within particular educational settings.

Consequently, curriculum implementation involves considerably more than the existence of an approved curriculum document. Teachers are required to interpret curriculum objectives, select appropriate teaching strategies and instructional materials, organise classroom activities, manage learning experiences and assess learners' progress (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017; Uche & Ogbonnaya, 2007). Implementation is therefore not simply a technical exercise of following a prescribed document; it is a practical process shaped by the interaction between curriculum expectations and the realities of schools, classrooms, teachers, learners and families. Fullan (2016, 57) captures the dynamic character of educational change by stating that "change is a process, not an event." This view is relevant to curriculum implementation because the approval or introduction of a curriculum does not automatically ensure that its intentions will be realised in classroom practice. The distinction between curriculum development and curriculum implementation is important in understanding the place of parental engagement. Curriculum development is concerned primarily with determining what learners should know, understand and be able to do, whereas implementation concerns the ways in which those intentions are translated into educational practice. Between the written curriculum and the curriculum experienced by learners are several factors that may facilitate or constrain implementation. These include teachers' knowledge and skills, availability of instructional materials, school leadership, time, class size, assessment practices, school culture and the wider social environment (Fullan, 2016; Rogan & Grayson, 2003). Parents and families are also part of this environment because learning does not occur exclusively within the classroom. Their attitudes towards education, communication with teachers, support for learning at home and participation in school activities can influence the conditions under which curriculum experiences are reinforced. Implementation research has traditionally distinguished between a fidelity perspective and a mutual-adaptation perspective. The fidelity perspective assumes that an educational innovation or curriculum should be implemented substantially according to its original design. Attention is consequently given to the extent to which teachers and schools reproduce the intended components of the innovation. Fullan and Pomfret (1977) demonstrate that implementation involves more than simply determining whether an innovation has been adopted. Their review identifies several dimensions of implementation and emphasises the need to examine what actually happens when an educational innovation is put into practice. They also caution against relying exclusively on participants' reports of implementation because reported use may not necessarily demonstrate that teachers possess the knowledge and skills required for actual implementation (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977, 340). This distinction is important for curriculum studies because the existence of a curriculum document or teachers' stated acceptance of it does not necessarily indicate that its intended practices are occurring in classrooms. The mutual-adaptation perspective provides a different way of understanding the implementation process. Rather than assuming that a curriculum can simply be transferred from policy documents into classrooms unchanged, this perspective recognises that implementation involves interaction between an educational innovation and the context in which it is introduced (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Snyder et al., 1992). Schools differ in their resources, teachers differ in their preparation and experience, learners come from different social and cultural backgrounds, and communities possess different forms of knowledge and support. These contextual differences influence how curriculum intentions are interpreted and enacted. Curriculum implementation can therefore involve adaptation by teachers and schools as they respond to the conditions in which the curriculum is being used.

The framework developed in this study is closer to the mutual-adaptation perspective. Parental engagement is not presented as a mechanism for enforcing fidelity to a fixed curriculum document. Rather, it is understood as one of the contextual conditions through which curriculum intentions are interpreted, supported and enacted. Parents interact with schools,

teachers and learners in ways that may reinforce curriculum experiences beyond the classroom. Their contribution may include helping children establish study routines, encouraging reading, discussing schoolwork, monitoring assignments, communicating with teachers and providing information about children's learning circumstances. In some cases, parents may also contribute cultural knowledge, professional experience, community contacts and practical resources that enrich learning activities (Rogan & Grayson, 2003; Altinyelken, 2010).

This understanding does not mean that parents determine the curriculum or that responsibility for implementation should be transferred from schools to families. Rather, parental engagement can be regarded as part of the wider environment within which curriculum implementation occurs. Rogan and Grayson (2003) draw attention to the conditions that enable curriculum implementation, including the capacity of schools to support and sustain educational practices. From this perspective, parental engagement is one element within a broader implementation system that also includes teacher competence, school leadership, instructional resources and educational policy. The contribution of parents is therefore most meaningful when it complements these other conditions. The relationship between parental engagement and curriculum implementation is particularly visible in the connection between school-based and home-based learning. A curriculum may prescribe particular knowledge, skills and attitudes for learners, but the extent to which these are reinforced outside the classroom can influence learners' educational experiences. For example, where reading forms part of curriculum objectives, parents can contribute by providing opportunities for children to read at home, discussing reading materials and encouraging regular reading habits. Where curriculum objectives emphasise independent learning, parents can support learners by establishing appropriate study routines and encouraging responsibility for schoolwork. Such activities do not replace classroom teaching; rather, they create continuity between formal instruction and the learner's home environment (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Jeynes, 2012).

Epstein's Model and Curriculum Implementation

Parenting and Curriculum Readiness

The parenting dimension of Epstein's model supports curriculum implementation by strengthening the conditions that enable children to participate consistently and meaningfully in learning. Epstein (2001, 5) identifies parenting as involving assistance to families in "establishing home environments to support children as students." The emphasis is therefore not on prescribing a single model of family life but on helping families understand how everyday practices can contribute to children's educational development. Schools can provide parents with practical information about attendance, regular routines, reading habits, study practices, child development and the creation of an environment that is conducive to learning (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2012). This dimension is important because curriculum implementation begins partly with learner readiness. A curriculum may be appropriately designed and teachers may possess the necessary instructional skills, but learners' ability to participate can still be affected by irregular attendance, inadequate study routines, limited supervision and a home environment that provides little opportunity for learning. Parenting support can therefore complement classroom instruction by helping families establish conditions in which children are more prepared to engage with curriculum experiences. Castro et al. (2015, 37) found that "parental expectations and parental home supervision" were among the forms of involvement most strongly associated with academic achievement. This finding suggests that the educational value of parenting may lie less in the amount of parental activity and more in the nature and purpose of that activity.

For curriculum implementation, the implication is that schools should provide practical and culturally appropriate guidance rather than simply instructing parents to become more

involved. Parents may need to understand why attendance matters, how regular reading contributes to learning, how routines can support concentration, and how encouragement and reasonable expectations can influence children's attitudes towards school. Such support recognises parents as partners in creating the conditions in which curriculum implementation can take place.

Communication and Curriculum Understanding

Communication is central to curriculum implementation because parents cannot meaningfully support curriculum goals if they do not understand what learners are expected to achieve. Epstein (2001, 5) describes communication as developing "effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress." This definition is significant because it presents communication as a two-way process rather than a one-directional transmission of information from school to parents.

Curriculum communication should therefore answer questions that families can act upon: What are children learning? Why does the learning matter? What should children be able to know or do? How is progress assessed? What difficulties are learners experiencing? What forms of support can reasonably be provided at home? Communication that answers these questions can help parents connect everyday support with curriculum objectives. By contrast, communication limited to announcements, disciplinary concerns and end-of-term reports may provide information without creating meaningful opportunities for parental engagement.

Schools can use several channels to communicate with families, including meetings, written notices, telephone calls, digital messages, parent forums and other locally appropriate methods. However, the effectiveness of communication depends less on the channel itself than on the clarity, regularity and usefulness of the information exchanged. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) place communication within a broader framework of school–family partnership, while Okeke (2014) emphasises the importance of constructive parent–school relationships. For curriculum implementation, effective communication should therefore be purposeful and reciprocal, enabling schools to communicate curriculum expectations while also allowing parents to provide information about children's learning experiences and circumstances.

Volunteering and Curriculum Support

Volunteering provides another avenue through which parents can contribute to curriculum implementation. Epstein (2001, 5) defines this dimension in terms of "recruitment and organization of parent help and support." In curriculum implementation, such support can take several forms, including reading activities, cultural programmes, career talks, practical demonstrations, school events and supervised learning activities. These activities can make curriculum content more concrete by connecting classroom knowledge with experiences, occupations and skills available within the community.

Parent volunteers may, for example, share professional experiences related to topics being taught, participate in cultural activities that enrich learners' understanding of their environment, assist with reading programmes or contribute practical demonstrations. Such activities can broaden the range of learning experiences available to learners and create connections between formal curriculum content and everyday life (Olaleye & Omotayo, 2009; Yusuf & Ajere, 2015). However, volunteering also raises questions of equity. If schools rely heavily on physical presence during school hours, parents with flexible employment, financial resources or greater control over their working schedules may have more opportunities to participate than parents whose circumstances make such participation difficult. Lareau (1987) shows that family–school interactions are influenced by social and cultural circumstances, making it important for schools to avoid treating one form of participation as the standard against which

all families are judged. For this reason, schools should provide varied forms of volunteering and participation. Parents might contribute through occasional school visits, preparation of materials, professional talks, cultural contributions, assistance with specific projects or support provided outside normal school hours. The objective should be to make parental contribution possible without creating an indirect expectation that favours families with greater economic or occupational flexibility.

Learning at Home and Curriculum Reinforcement

Learning at home represents perhaps the most direct connection between curriculum implementation and family life. Epstein (2001, 5) describes this dimension as providing "information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities." The significance of this dimension lies in the continuity it can create between classroom instruction and children's experiences outside school.

Schools can support learning at home by giving parents clear explanations of learning objectives and practical suggestions for supporting children. Parents do not need to reproduce classroom teaching in the home. Instead, they can ask children to explain what they have learned, encourage reading, discuss classroom experiences, provide opportunities to apply knowledge in everyday situations, monitor assignments and establish regular study routines. Such activities reinforce learning while allowing teachers to retain responsibility for professional instruction. Research supports the importance of considering both the existence and the quality of parental involvement. Wilder (2014, 377) found a positive relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement across the studies included in the meta-synthesis, while also noting the importance of understanding the nature of the involvement being examined. Boonk et al. (2018) similarly identify particular forms of parental involvement as being more consistently associated with children's academic achievement than others. These findings are relevant to curriculum implementation because they caution against treating all forms of parental participation as equally valuable. Nigerian evidence provides a more context-specific illustration. Akindipe (2025) found that a structured intervention combining home structure, parental supervision and school–home communication significantly improved mathematics achievement among primary school pupils in Lagos when compared with a control group. However, the intervention did not produce a statistically significant improvement in mathematics self-efficacy. This distinction is important because it suggests that parental engagement may influence different dimensions of learning in different ways. Improvements in academic performance should not automatically be assumed to produce corresponding changes in learners' confidence or motivation. The emphasis in the learning-at-home dimension should therefore be on reinforcement rather than duplication. Parents can encourage reading, ask children to explain concepts, relate school learning to everyday experiences and help establish regular study routines. Such practices extend learning without requiring parents to reproduce classroom instruction. This is particularly important in households where parents may have limited formal education or may not be familiar with the content and methods used in the current curriculum. Hornby and Blackwell (2018) argue for approaches to parental involvement that recognise the barriers families may face and avoid assuming that all parents possess the same knowledge, time or resources.

Decision Making and Curriculum Participation

Decision making extends parental engagement from supporting learning to participating in processes that shape educational provision. Epstein (2001, 5) identifies decision making as "including parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives." In relation to curriculum implementation, this dimension creates opportunities for parents to contribute knowledge about the local context in which curriculum policies and programmes

are implemented. Parents may possess knowledge about local language practices, cultural expectations, community occupations, children's experiences and community concerns that can assist schools in determining how curriculum content can be made more relevant to learners. Such knowledge does not replace professional curriculum expertise, but it can complement it by providing information about the context in which curriculum implementation occurs (Nwangwu & Aguba, 2014; Igbokwe & Eze, 2016).

The distinction between consultation and shared decision making is particularly important. A school may invite parents to a meeting, provide information and ask for comments without giving those parents any meaningful opportunity to influence the eventual decision. Such a process represents communication or consultation rather than substantive participation. Olibie (2014) therefore provides a useful basis for distinguishing between nominal participation and meaningful parental involvement in educational decision making.

For parental participation to carry weight, schools should provide relevant information before decisions are taken, create opportunities for parents to express their views, explain how those views are considered and, where appropriate, involve parent representatives in continuing decision-making structures. Within curriculum implementation, this could include consultation on aspects of curriculum adaptation, learner support strategies, school priorities and programmes designed to connect school learning with community realities.

Community Collaboration and Curriculum Enrichment

The sixth dimension, collaborating with the community, extends partnership beyond individual families to the wider social environment in which schools operate. Epstein (2001, 5) describes this dimension as "identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development." This dimension is particularly relevant to curriculum implementation because schools do not possess all the knowledge, expertise, facilities and experiences that can contribute to effective learning. Local professionals can contribute expertise through career talks, demonstrations and mentoring activities. Cultural institutions and community organisations can provide experiences that deepen learners' understanding of history, culture and society. Health services can support health-related education, while businesses and other organisations can provide opportunities through which learners can connect classroom concepts with occupational and social realities (Sheldon, 2003; Yusuf & Ajere, 2015).

Community collaboration can therefore enrich curriculum implementation by helping learners understand how abstract concepts operate in real contexts. For example, mathematics can be connected with financial activities in the community, science with local environmental or health issues, social studies with community governance and history with local heritage. Such connections can make curriculum content more meaningful because learners encounter knowledge not only as material presented in textbooks but also as something reflected in their surrounding environment. However, community collaboration should be purposeful rather than simply increasing the number of organisations associated with a school. Partnerships should have clearly defined educational objectives, responsibilities and expected outcomes. Schools also need to consider safeguarding, confidentiality, professional boundaries and the suitability of community activities for learners. Community participation is most valuable when it is deliberately connected to curriculum objectives rather than operating as an unrelated set of extracurricular activities.

Integrating the Six Dimensions into Curriculum Implementation

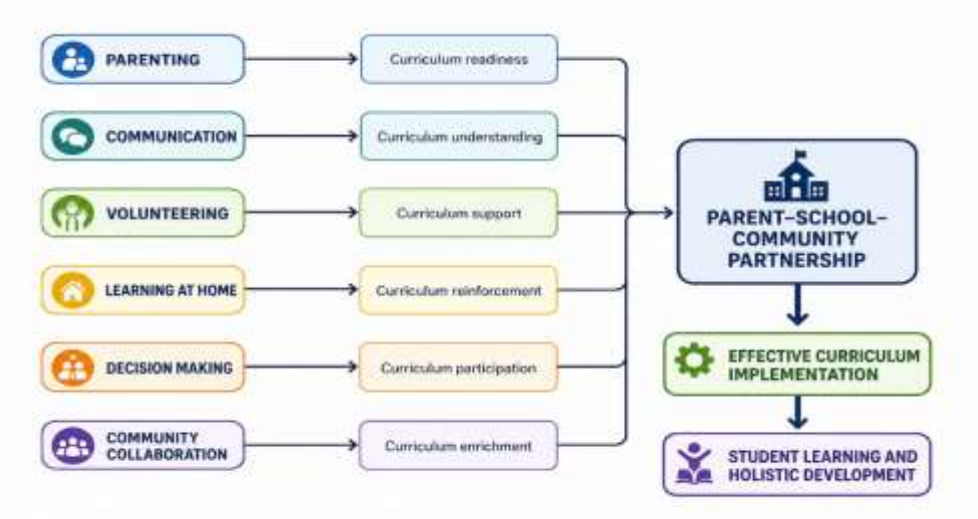
Epstein's six dimensions are most useful for curriculum implementation when they are treated as interconnected rather than as six independent activities. Parenting can establish conditions

for learner readiness; communication can help families understand curriculum expectations; volunteering can provide additional human and experiential resources; learning at home can reinforce classroom learning; decision making can provide parents with opportunities to contribute to educational planning; and community collaboration can extend the resources and experiences available to learners. Together, these dimensions provide a framework through which schools can organise relationships with families and communities around the educational development of learners. The significance of the model therefore lies not simply in encouraging more parental participation but in helping schools identify different purposes and forms of participation. This distinction is important because high levels of parental activity do not necessarily indicate effective curriculum support. A parent may attend several school meetings without understanding what the child is learning, while another parent may rarely attend school because of work commitments but provide consistent support for reading, homework and study routines at home. Epstein's framework allows these different forms of engagement to be recognised while directing attention towards their educational purpose. For curriculum implementation, the model consequently provides a useful organising framework for moving from general appeals for parental involvement towards more purposeful forms of partnership. Its value is greatest when schools adapt the six dimensions to their particular social and educational circumstances and when parental participation is understood as complementary to professional teaching. In this way, Epstein's model provides a conceptual bridge between parental engagement and curriculum implementation: it identifies the practical areas through which families and communities can contribute while maintaining the school's responsibility for organising, guiding and evaluating the educational process.

The Epstein–Curriculum Implementation Partnership Framework

The conceptual contribution of this paper is the Epstein–Curriculum Implementation Partnership Framework, which translates Epstein's six dimensions from general categories of parental involvement into curriculum-related functions. Parenting supports curriculum readiness; communication supports curriculum understanding; volunteering supports curriculum delivery and enrichment; learning at home supports curriculum reinforcement; decision making supports curriculum participation and contextual adaptation; and community collaboration supports curriculum enrichment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Epstein–Curriculum Implementation Partnership Framework



The framework assumes that the six dimensions operate through a parent–school–community partnership, and that this partnership strengthens curriculum implementation where

participation is purposeful, reciprocal and tied to curriculum goals. The outcome of interest is not parental participation itself but improved opportunities for student learning and holistic development. One qualification runs through the framework: the relationship it proposes is conditional rather than automatic. Effective curriculum implementation requires appropriate teachers, resources, leadership, policy support and school capacity. Epstein's model can organise partnership around those conditions, but it cannot compensate for their absence, a point Rogan and Grayson (2003) make forcefully in their account of implementation capacity in developing-country systems. The framework is best read as a partnership mechanism operating within a wider curriculum implementation system rather than as a substitute for the other components of that system.

Critical Issues in Applying Epstein's Model in The Nigerian Context

Olibie's (2014) survey of 257 secondary school principals in Anambra State gives these issues empirical grounding. Principals reported that parental involvement in curriculum implementation was slight, and that perception did not differ by the principals' gender. The constraints discussed below therefore reflect documented practice in at least one Nigerian education system rather than hypothetical risks, and comparable patterns of thin involvement have been reported elsewhere in the country (Afolabi, 2014; Igbokwe & Eze, 2016).

Socio-Economic Inequality

Parents differ in the time, income, educational experience and access to communication technologies they can bring to their children's schooling. A participation model that assumes every family can attend meetings, volunteer during school hours or provide extensive homework help will favour more advantaged families and may widen the gaps it was meant to close (Lareau, 1987; Castro et al., 2015). Schools should therefore open several routes to participation and stop treating physical presence as the measure of commitment.

Cultural and Contextual Considerations

Parent–school relationships are shaped by local expectations about authority, education and the respective roles of teachers and parents. The model should be adapted to local circumstances rather than installed as a fixed programme, a lesson that emerges clearly from studies of imported curriculum reforms in African systems (Rogan & Grayson, 2003; Altinyelken, 2010). Cultural adaptation should preserve the principle of partnership while allowing the forms of participation to vary.

Digital Divide and Communication Barriers

Digital communication can raise the speed and frequency of school–family contact, but leaning on digital platforms excludes families with limited connectivity or devices. Schools should choose channels that match the realities of their communities and keep alternatives available, since communication failures remain among the school-based barriers most consistently reported in the literature (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

Parental Educational Background

Parents with limited formal education may be willing to support learning yet uncertain about what schools expect. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) show that barriers to parental involvement operate at several levels, including family and parent–teacher factors, and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) add that parents' sense of efficacy shapes whether they act at all. Schools should therefore provide practical guidance rather than assume that parents already know how to support the curriculum (Okeke, 2014).

School Leadership and Teacher Attitudes

Partnership depends in part on how schools understand the role of parents. Oloruntegbe's (2011) study of Nigerian science teachers shows the importance of stakeholder involvement, commitment and innovativeness in curriculum development and implementation, particularly the involvement of teachers themselves. The point extends, with caution, to partnership design: schools need internal ownership and clearly defined responsibilities before family participation can be sustained (Sheldon, 2003; Fullan, 2016).

Tokenistic Participation

Tokenism is a standing risk. Parents may be invited to activities without being given any real opportunity to shape decisions or learning. Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) distinction between school-controlled participation and deeper engagement with learning is instructive here, as is Olibie's (2014) finding that principals tended to regard parents as non-specialists with little to offer curriculum work. Schools should therefore ask whether parents have influence, not only whether they attend.

Implications for Curriculum Leaders And Schools

The proposed Epstein–Curriculum Implementation Partnership Framework has implications for the different stakeholders who participate, directly or indirectly, in curriculum planning and implementation. The central implication is that parental and community involvement should not be treated as an additional activity that occurs outside the curriculum. Rather, it should be connected deliberately to the processes through which curriculum objectives are interpreted, communicated, supported and enacted. This requires changes at the levels of curriculum planning, school leadership, classroom practice, family participation, community engagement and education policy.

Curriculum Planners

Curriculum planners have an important responsibility to recognise that curriculum implementation does not take place exclusively within the classroom. Learners move between school, home and community contexts, and these contexts influence how they understand and respond to educational experiences. Consequently, curriculum planning should take reasonable account of the family and community environments within which learners live. Curriculum guidance can therefore include practical suggestions for home reinforcement, opportunities for community-based learning and appropriate channels through which families can provide feedback about learners' experiences (Offorma, 2005; Afolabi, 2014). This does not mean that curriculum planners should prescribe how families ought to organise their homes or require parents to reproduce classroom teaching. Rather, curriculum documents can provide guidance that enables families to understand the purposes of learning and identify realistic ways of supporting children. For example, where a curriculum places emphasis on reading, problem-solving, civic responsibility, health education or practical skills, implementation guidance can suggest simple activities through which these objectives can be reinforced in everyday settings. Such an approach recognises the home as one of the environments in which curriculum intentions may be reinforced. Curriculum planners should also consider the diversity of Nigerian families and communities. Differences in language, literacy, occupation, socio-economic circumstances, access to technology and geographical location can influence the forms of participation available to parents. Consequently, curriculum implementation strategies that depend heavily on digital communication, formal literacy or parents' physical presence at school may unintentionally exclude some families. Flexible and locally adaptable

guidance would allow schools to translate the broad principles of family engagement into forms that are appropriate to their particular communities. Another implication is that curriculum planners should create opportunities for local knowledge to contribute to curriculum contextualisation. Community knowledge, occupations, cultural practices and local resources can help teachers connect abstract curriculum concepts to learners' lived experiences. The inclusion of such possibilities within curriculum guidance would strengthen the relationship between formal curriculum content and the social environment in which learners develop.

School Administrators

School administrators have a central role in converting the principle of partnership into an organised school practice. A school that depends only on occasional parent–teacher meetings may provide opportunities for communication without necessarily creating a sustained partnership. School leaders should therefore move towards a structured partnership system in which communication, learning support, volunteering, decision making and community collaboration are planned as continuing components of school life.A school partnership plan can identify the specific forms of engagement appropriate to the school's curriculum priorities. It can establish communication routines, procedures for supporting learning at home, opportunities for parents to contribute their knowledge and skills, arrangements for parent participation in appropriate school decisions and mechanisms for developing community partnerships. Such planning can also clarify the responsibilities of teachers, administrators, parents and community partners. Evidence concerning school-based partnership programmes suggests that sustained structures, including action teams and organised planning processes, are important in moving family engagement beyond isolated events (Sheldon, 2003; Epstein et al., 2019). Leadership is particularly important because partnership practices can easily become dependent on the enthusiasm of individual teachers or administrators. When leadership changes, informal practices may disappear unless they have been incorporated into the school's structures and routines. School administrators should therefore institutionalise partnership activities through school improvement plans, staff responsibilities, communication procedures and regular monitoring. School leaders should also pay attention to the quality of relationships between teachers and families. Parents are more likely to participate meaningfully when they are treated respectfully and when communication is reciprocal rather than primarily corrective or informational. Administrators can support this by providing teachers with opportunities for professional development in family engagement, communication and culturally responsive practice. Importantly, school administrators should avoid equating successful partnership with the number of parents who attend school events. Attendance figures provide only a limited indication of engagement. A parent who attends a meeting but has little understanding of the curriculum may be less connected to the child's learning than a parent who cannot attend physically but communicates regularly with the teacher and supports learning at home. School leaders should therefore evaluate partnership in relation to its purpose and educational contribution rather than simply counting participation.

Teachers

Teachers occupy a particularly important position because they translate curriculum intentions into actual learning experiences and are often the main point of contact between schools and families. Their role in partnership therefore extends beyond communicating notices about school activities. Teachers should explain learning expectations clearly, identify realistic ways parents can support learning and use information provided by parents to understand learners more fully. Effective teacher–parent communication should be connected to the curriculum. Rather than simply informing parents that a topic has been taught, teachers can explain what

learners are expected to understand, the difficulties they may encounter and the kinds of activities that can reinforce learning outside school. Such communication makes parental participation more purposeful because parents can see how their contribution relates to specific learning objectives. Teachers can also draw upon parents' knowledge and experience. Parents may possess occupational, cultural, linguistic or community knowledge that can enrich classroom learning. When such knowledge is incorporated appropriately, learners can encounter curriculum content through examples that are familiar and meaningful to them. This can be particularly useful in subjects where local experience provides opportunities for practical illustration (Oloruntegbe, 2011; Ajayi & Afolabi, 2012). At the same time, teachers should avoid reducing parents to sources of money, materials, transportation or other logistical assistance. Material contributions can support schools, but they should not become the primary measure of parental participation. Such an approach risks privileging families with greater financial resources while overlooking parents who may have limited economic capacity but considerable knowledge, time, cultural resources or commitment to their children's learning.
Teachers should also recognise that parents differ in their ability to provide academic assistance. Some parents may have limited formal education and may therefore feel uncomfortable helping with subjects taught in unfamiliar ways. The appropriate response is not to exclude such parents but to provide simple and practical guidance that enables them to support learning without requiring them to become substitute teachers.

Parents

The framework also has implications for how parents are understood within the curriculum implementation process. Parents should be recognised as partners in children's education rather than as passive recipients of information from schools. Their contribution may include establishing routines that support attendance and study, encouraging reading and learning, communicating with teachers, participating in appropriate school activities and sharing information about their children's interests, needs and community experiences (Nwosu & Onyekuru, 2015). Parental partnership, however, should not be defined according to a single model of participation. Parents differ in their employment responsibilities, educational backgrounds, family circumstances, access to technology and availability of time. Consequently, meaningful involvement may take different forms. One parent may participate through school meetings, another through communication with the teacher, while another may contribute primarily by establishing a consistent study routine at home. Parents should also be encouraged to understand the purposes of the curriculum rather than simply receiving instructions about school activities. When parents understand what children are learning and why it matters, they are better positioned to reinforce learning through ordinary family experiences. This may include discussing classroom topics, encouraging children to explain what they have learned, providing opportunities for reading or practical application, and communicating concerns to teachers. The framework does not assume that parents possess specialist teaching expertise. Their contribution is complementary to, rather than a replacement for, the professional responsibilities of teachers. The school remains responsible for providing qualified instruction, while parents can create supportive conditions around that instruction.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Parental involvement is situated within the wider social process through which curriculum intentions are translated into educational practice. Curriculum implementation does not occur exclusively within classrooms; it is influenced by the relationships among schools, families and communities and by the resources and conditions surrounding learners. Epstein's school–family–community partnership model provides a useful structure for organising these

relationships because its six dimensions identify distinct but interconnected ways in which families and communities can contribute to children's education.

The Epstein–Curriculum Implementation Partnership Framework proposed in this paper extends this perspective by connecting each dimension of Epstein's model to a specific aspect of curriculum implementation. Parenting is associated with curriculum readiness because supportive home conditions can prepare learners to participate effectively in schooling. Communication is connected to curriculum understanding because families need clear information about what children are expected to learn and how progress is assessed. Volunteering is related to curriculum support because parents and community members can contribute knowledge, skills and experiences that complement classroom instruction. Learning at home is associated with curriculum reinforcement because learning can be extended through reading, discussion, practice and everyday activities. Decision making is linked to curriculum participation because parents can contribute contextual knowledge to decisions affecting educational practice. Community collaboration is connected to curriculum enrichment because community resources can provide experiences and expertise that extend formal classroom learning. The framework does not, however, suggest that parental involvement is a substitute for effective teaching, adequate resources, school leadership or coherent curriculum policy. Rather, it positions partnership as one component of a wider implementation system. This distinction is important because an overemphasis on parental responsibility could shift attention away from institutional responsibilities and place unrealistic expectations on families. The responsibility for effective curriculum implementation remains shared across the education system.

Several recommendations follow from the analysis.

First, schools should develop structured school–family–community partnership plans that connect each of Epstein's six dimensions to specific curriculum objectives. Partnership should therefore be incorporated into school planning rather than organised only when particular events arise. Second, school leaders should establish flexible communication and participation arrangements. These should recognise differences in parents' work schedules, educational backgrounds, literacy levels, economic circumstances and access to digital technologies. Multiple channels of communication can help prevent participation from becoming dependent upon one particular form of access.

Third, teachers should receive preparation and continuing professional development in family engagement. Such preparation should focus on communicating learning expectations, designing realistic home-support activities, recognising parents' contextual knowledge and developing respectful two-way relationships with families.

Fourth, schools should distinguish meaningful engagement from simple attendance at school activities. Evaluation should consider whether parental participation contributes to learners' understanding, learning routines, communication, curriculum relevance and educational support rather than relying solely on numerical measures such as meeting attendance.

Fifth, schools should develop community partnerships around clearly defined curriculum purposes. Community professionals, organisations and institutions should be selected because their knowledge, skills or resources can contribute meaningfully to identified learning objectives.

Sixth, policy makers should provide an enabling framework for school–family–community partnership through leadership development, teacher preparation, communication support and opportunities for stakeholder participation. At the same time, policies should avoid participation requirements that unintentionally privilege families with greater economic, educational or technological resources.

Seventh, future research should empirically test the Epstein–Curriculum Implementation Partnership Framework within Nigerian schools. Such studies could examine the six dimensions separately and collectively, using quantitative measures of curriculum implementation alongside qualitative accounts from teachers, parents, learners and school leaders. Building on the descriptive evidence reported by Olibie (2014) and intervention evidence such as Akindipe (2025), future research could investigate which forms of partnership are most closely associated with particular aspects of curriculum implementation and how these relationships vary across school and community contexts.

The wider implication of the framework is therefore a shift in how parents and communities are positioned within curriculum implementation. Rather than being treated primarily as recipients of school information, sources of financial assistance or participants in occasional school events, they can be understood as educational partners whose knowledge, relationships and everyday activities can contribute to the enactment of curriculum. This does not diminish the professional responsibilities of teachers and schools. Instead, it clarifies the complementary roles of the different actors involved in children's education.

When family and community participation is deliberately connected to curriculum purposes, it becomes more than an activity surrounding schooling. It becomes part of the social and institutional conditions through which curriculum intentions are interpreted, reinforced and enacted. The significance of Epstein's model for curriculum implementation therefore lies not simply in encouraging greater parental participation, but in providing a framework through which schools can ask a more important question: how can relationships among schools, families and communities be organised so that they contribute meaningfully to what learners are expected to know, understand and do?

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